word of mouth / gossip and american poetry

chad bennett

VISIT…

Word of Mouth

Hopkins Studies in Modernism
Douglas Mao, *Series Editor*

Word of Mouth

Gossip and American Poetry

Chad Bennett

Johns Hopkins University Press
Baltimore

© 2018 Johns Hopkins University Press
All rights reserved. Published 2018
Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper
9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Johns Hopkins University Press
2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21218-4363
www.press.jhu.edu

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Control Number:
2017039407

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-4214-2537-5 (hardcover : acid-free paper)
ISBN 1-4214-2537-8 (hardcover : acid-free paper)

Special discounts are available for bulk purchases of this book. For more information, please contact Special Sales at 410-516-6936 or specialsales@press.jhu.edu.

Johns Hopkins University Press uses environmentally friendly book materials, including recycled text paper that is composed of at least 30 percent post-consumer waste, whenever possible.

For ASHLY / To MANNY

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction: The Poet and the Gossip 1

1 "They Will Tell Well": Gertrude Stein, Address, and Gossip 30

2 "Ain't You Heard?": Langston Hughes's Queer Gossip 79

3 "The Dish That's Art": Frank O'Hara's Self-Gossip 126

4 "The Celestial Salon": James Merrill and the Afterlife of Gossip 168

Coda: Status Update 224

Notes 249
Bibliography 291
Index 317

This page intentionally left blank

Acknowledgments

A formative moment for this project on gossip: skimming the acknowledgments of a noted queer theorist's first study, where I find, penciled in the margin next to a sentence thanking his wife, one reader's bewildered annotation: *his wife?!*

During the several years I spent writing this book I have thought a surprising number of times about this marginalia and its querying of the complicated relationship between the objects we create and the lives that nourish their creation. To learn something about that relationship, discerning readers often turn to an academic book's acknowledgments pages, where one finds an expansive record of personal affinities, social networks, and institutional and intellectual affiliations distilled to a set of affect-laden names whose ritual listing is an act both of gratitude and gossip. Naming at last my own names here similarly feels like gossip of the richest, most instructive, and affirming sort: I recognize with fresh delight and astonishment the worlds that enabled me to write this book and the worlds that the writing of this book itself brought about.

I have been fortunate to have had teachers who modeled critical inquiry and poetry as possible—and possibly interrelated—ways of being. I'm indebted to Joss Marsh, William Solomon, and Eavan Boland for inexplicably encouraging the writing and ambitions of a quiet first-generation college student in over his head at Stanford. At the University of Iowa, Jorie Graham, James Galvin, Marvin Bell, Carl Phillips, and Susan Wheeler sharpened my sense of poetry's affordances. And at Cornell, Ellis Hanson, Debby Fried, and Nick Salvato provided indispensable mentorship and scholarly élan, as did Roger Gilbert, to whose rigor and unassuming brilliance I continue to aspire.

Many of the ideas in this book have their origins in (often boozy, some-

times gossipy) conversations with Cornell friends. Thank you to Peter Bailey, Caetlin Benson-Allott, Karen Bourrier, Julie Phillips Brown, David Coombs, Sarah Cote, Colin Dewey, Violet Hayes, Janice Ho, Theo Hummer, Julie Joosten, Corinna Lee, Ramesh Mallipeddi, Petter Nordal, Seth Perlow, Masha Raskolnikov, Anthony Reed, Meredith Talusan, and Sarah Weiger. Thanks on top of thanks to Jessica Metzler, my graduate school partner in crime.

At the University of Texas at Austin, I am lucky to work alongside colleagues whose teaching, writing, and all-around good humor it is a pleasure to witness and absorb. Thanks to all, and particularly to Sam Baker, Phil Barrish, Dan Birkholz, Brian Bremen, Tom Cable, Mia Carter, James Cox, Ann Cvetkovich, Brian Doherty, Alan Friedman, Laura Gutiérrez, Kurt Heinzelman, Neville Hoad, Heather Houser, Martin Kevorkian, David Kornhaber, Donna Kornhaber, the late Wayne Lesser, Allen MacDuffie, Carol MacKay, Eric Mallin, Julie Minich, Gretchen Murphy, Wayne Rebhorn, Matt Richardson, Snehal Shingavi, Jennifer Wilks, and Hannah Wojciechowski. I am exceptionally grateful to Liz Cullingford and Cole Hutchison for their sage guidance. J. K. Barret was a fount of information and insight and buoyed my spirits at key moments: thank you. Meta DuEwa Jones invigorated poetry at UT and thoughtfully commented on parts of this book; both are better for it. And impossible and ongoing thanks to Lisa Moore, whose name should be in bold, and to whose feedback, dazzle, compassion, and relentless optimism I owe an awful, awful lot.

This work also owes much to the graduate students I've had the good fortune to learn from at UT, especially Rebecca Macmillan, Jeff Boruszak, Ryan Sharp, Elizabeth Frye, Julia Delacroix, Sequoia Maner, and Sam Sax. I thank as well the students in each iteration of my undergraduate seminar on gossip and poetry, who were more than game as we tossed around many of the ideas that made it into this book, and (alas) even more that did not.

Beyond UT, thank you Joshua Guzmán for spacing in and spacing out.

Jeremy Capello talked me through (or into, or out of) a difficult time in this book's final stages with grace and wit: thank you.

Early work on this study was generously supported by a New Faculty Fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies. Funding from the University of Texas at Austin, its College of Liberal Arts, and the Department of English fostered much of the book's research, writing, and revision, and a subvention grant awarded by the Office of the President was vital to its production.

Parts of chapters 1 and 4 appeared, in different forms, in *Modern Drama* and *Twentieth-Century Literature*, respectively. Thank you to the editors of those journals, and to University of Toronto Press and Duke University Press, for permission to include that material here.

It's a thrill to thank Matt McAdam, Catherine Goldstead, Juliana McCarthy, Hilary Jacqmin, Alexa Selph, Carrie Watterson, and everyone at Johns Hopkins University Press for so smoothly ushering this project from manuscript to book. To the readers whose careful and canny responses improved these pages, thank you. Doug Mao's early and outsized support of this project has meant everything to me: immense thanks, Doug, for your shrewd commentary and the model of your gorgeous scholarship.

The instant I saw Kathy Butterly's quirky little ceramic sculpture, *Loud Silence*, I imagined its queer form of confusion—of the familiar and the strange, of listening and speaking, of person and thing—as the dishy avatar of this book. Thank you, Kathy, for permission to use an image of this piece on the cover.

Hoa Nguyen's weekly poetry workshops in Austin transformed my ideas about writing and community: thanks to Hoa, Desiree Morales, Cindy St. John, Susannah Hollister, Jeff Pethybridge, and (of course again!) Lisa Moore, who invited me into the fold.

Many Austin friends provided a crash course in queerness during the writing of this book; among them, thank you to Julian Garza and, most of all, Justin Barker, who teaches the children and makes my glum disposition more gay.

Biggest love to my shy, goofy family for their grounding care and patience: thank you, Grandma Zagar; Mom and Dad; Mike, Rachel, Jada, Nina, and Ivan; Kristy, Tony, Arlo, and Maisie; Luke, Sally, Clark, and Nile; and Edie.

A little spell against future woe: Manny Alcala, Manny Alcala, Manny Alcala . . .

This book began and goes on as part of one uninterruptable conversation with Ashly Bennett, without whose nuanced perceptions, unflinching support, laughter, and love it simply would not exist. Without you to dedicate it to, why would I even write it?

I gratefully acknowledge permission to reprint excerpts from the following works:

"The Grapevine," from *Some Trees* by John Ashbery, copyright © 1956, 1978. Reprinted by permission of Georges Borchardt, Inc., and Carcanet Press (UK) on behalf of the author. All rights reserved.

"Tonight," from *A Fast Life: The Collected Poems of Tim Dlugos* by Tim Dlugos, courtesy of the estate of Tim Dlugos.

"Sex with a Famous Poet," from *The Star-Spangled Banner* by Denise Duhamel, courtesy of Southern Illinois University Press.

"Elliptical," from *Sleeping with the Dictionary* by Harryette Mullen, courtesy of University of California Press.

The Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers, courtesy of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, used by permission of David Higham Associates Ltd. on behalf of the estate of Gertrude Stein.

Stanzas in Meditation: The Corrected Edition by Gertrude Stein, used by permission of Yale University Press and the estate of Gertrude Stein.

"Same in Blues," "Dream Boogie," "Motto," "Children's Rhymes," "Cafe: 3 A.M.," "Jitney," "Joe Louis [1]," "Comment on Curb," "Gauge," "Sister," "What? So Soon!," "Question [2]," "Neighbor," and "Live and Let Live" from *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* by Langston Hughes, edited by Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel, copyright © 1994 by the Estate of Langston Hughes. Used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, an imprint of the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

Langston Hughes to Carl Van Vechten, October 30, 1941, from *Remember Me to Harlem: The Letters of Langston Hughes and Carl Van Vechten, 1925–1964* edited by Emily Bernard, copyright © 2001 by Emily Bernard and the Estate of Langston Hughes. Used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, an imprint of the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved. Additional rights by permission of Harold Ober Associates Incorporated.

"The Day Lady Died," "Personal Poem," and "Adieu to Norman, Bonjour to Joan and Jean-Paul" from *Lunch Poems*, copyright © 1954 by Frank O'Hara. "A Party Full of Friends" and "Prose for the Times" from *Poems Retrieved,* edited by Donald Allen, copyright © 1955, 1956, 1967, 1970, 1974, 1975, 1977, 1996, 2013 by Maureen O'Hara, Administratrix of the Estate of Frank O'Hara. All reprinted with the permission of The Permissions Company, Inc., on behalf of City Lights Books, www.citylights.com.

"Autobiographia Literaria," "Spleen," "At the Old Place," "On Rachmaninoff's Birthday (I am so glad that Larry Rivers made a)," "Grand Central," "Song (Is it dirty)," "Round Robin," "The Bores," "To Richard Miller," "'The 'Unfinished'," "Day and Night in 1952," and "Dido" from *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara* by Frank O'Hara, copyright © 1971 by Maureen Granville-Smith, Administratrix of the Estate of Frank O'Hara, copyright renewed 1999 by Maureen O'Hara Granville-Smith and Donald Allen. Used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, an imprint of the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

The letters of Frank O'Hara, copyright © 2017 by Maureen Granville-Smith, Aministratrix of the Estate of Frank O'Hara.

The James Merrill papers, copyright © 2001 The Literary Estate of James Merrill at Washington University, used by permission of The Wylie Agency LLC.

The Changing Light at Sandover: A Poem by James Merrill, copyright © 1980, 1982 by James Merrill. Used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, an imprint of the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

"Poets at Home" from *Collected Poems* by James Merrill, copyright © 2001 by the Literary Estate of James Merrill at Washington University. Used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, an imprint of the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

This Connection of Everyone with Lungs by Juliana Spahr, courtesy of University of California Press.

Poems from *Snowflake / different streets*, copyright © 2012 by Eileen Myles, are reprinted with permission of the author and Wave Books.

"[your shiny buckle unfastens at last]," from *Repast: Tea, Lunch, and Cocktails*, by D. A. Powell, copyright © 1998, 2014 by D. A. Powell. Reprinted with the permission of The Permissions Company, Inc., on behalf of Graywolf Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, www.graywolfpress.org.

Word of Mouth

This page intentionally left blank

Introduction

The Poet and the Gossip

> Gossip exalts in poetry.
>
> Robert Frost, 1956 lecture

> Expect pages and by word of mouth.
>
> Gertrude Stein, "An Instant Answer or a Hundred Prominent Men"

Ours is an age of gossip. Buzz, chatter, dish, gab, hearsay, schmooze, tittle-tattle: proliferating social scientific research on idle talk has ensured we have it on good authority that such various species of gossip account for at least two-thirds of everyday conversation.[1] And certainly gossip's voracious presence in daily life only grows if, in addition to face-to-face interaction, one considers mobile phone calls and text messages, e-mail exchanges, social networking sites and apps, and the unprecedented transfer of information across global, online communities, mobilized in part by computer networking protocols known as "gossip networks" (whose design mimics the exchange of gossip). More than a century after Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis famously worried about the fate of privacy when "numerous mechanical devices threaten to make good the prediction that 'what is whispered in the closet shall be proclaimed from the house-tops,'" modern culture—from the talk of the town to *TMZ*, from the telephone to Twitter—has been marked by an extraordinary and increasing ability, and desire, to spread gossip rapidly and widely.[2]

This book provides an account of the dynamic relationship between gossip and poetry in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, revealing gossip's formative queer role in modern and contemporary American poetry.[3] In readings of poems by Gertrude Stein, Langston Hughes, Frank O'Hara, James

Merrill, and others, I demonstrate how poetry has been shaped by its interactions with gossip and how "gossip," as Robert Frost declares, "exalts in poetry."[4] This might seem a strange claim, since—particularly from the perspective of the twenty-first century and the digital transformation of knowledge and culture—poetry must appear an unlikely or outmoded vehicle for gossip. At first blush, gossip's ostensibly frivolous talk about others would sound at odds with a modern lyric poetry commonly understood as serious, intensely subjective expression. Whereas gossip revels in its many voices—as it spreads it accumulates voices, suggesting an increasingly untidy, increasingly collaborative authorship—the lyric poet is most often seen as going it alone, as in John Stuart Mill's touchstone assertion, "All poetry is of the nature of soliloquy."[5] Perhaps for these reasons, theorists of gossip have ignored its frequent appearances in poetry, and even scholars specifically interested in gossip's relationship to literary language have focused on more obviously social genres, such as the novel or drama.[6] But, of all genres, lyric poetry has been most self-reflexively concerned with the matters of privacy that are so crucial to gossip, and particularly with the effects of a privacy that paradoxically circulates in public.[7] In this sense, it is not surprising that poets like Frost and their everyday readers have persisted in casually thinking of poems as gossipy. Such persistence recommends a more rigorous consideration of poetry as a neglected archive for our thinking about gossip and of gossip as a necessary rubric for understanding how poets have negotiated modern culture's shifting conceptions of privacy and publicity, of selfhood and sociality, and, especially, of poetry itself.

In this volume, I bring together the insights of queer and lyric theory to tell the story of how gossip modeled forms of sociality and voice that poets experimented with over the course of the twentieth century. Through a set of case studies of culturally diverse American poets who absorbed and adapted the loose talk that swirled about them and their work, I argue that gossip became a vehicle for the performance of alternative sexualities and concomitant meditations on alternative modes of poetic practice. At the heart of this argument is a queer reappraisal of modern lyric poetry. Attending to gossip's key role in modern and contemporary poetry enables a recognition of the unpredictable ways that conventional understandings of the modern lyric poem—as, for example, an utterance smudging the lines between private and public, knowing and unknowing, intimacy and strangeness—have been informed by, and afforded a uniquely suitable space for, the expression of queer sensibilities.

"My Name Is Gossip"

In exploring how four major American poets creatively reimagined the demands of the lyric genre by turning to the queer art of gossip, I present a mostly affirmative relationship between poetry and gossip. Yet what is perhaps the most read poem on the matter suggests, quite the opposite, how gossip has been less exalted than denigrated by poetry. Indeed, gossip, as this poem's title melodramatically announces, is "Nobody's Friend," let alone poetry's:

> My name is Gossip. I have no respect for justice.
> I maim without killing. I break hearts and ruin lives.
> I am cunning and malicious and gather strength with age.
> The more I am quoted, the more I am believed.
> My victims are helpless. They cannot protect themselves against me because I have no name and no face.
> To track me down is impossible. The harder you try, the more elusive I become.
> I am nobody's friend.
> Once I tarnish a reputation, it is never the same.
> I topple governments and wreck marriages.
> I ruin careers and cause sleepless nights, heartaches and indigestion.
> I make innocent people cry in their pillows.
> Even my name hisses. I am called Gossip. I make headlines and headaches.
> Before you repeat a story, ask yourself:
> Is it true? Is it harmless? Is it necessary?
> If it isn't, don't repeat it.[8]

"Nobody's Friend" appeared in the long-running syndicated advice column Dear Abby. According to Abigail Van Buren (the pseudonym of Pauline Phillips and now her daughter, Jeanne Phillips), she first read the poem when it ran as "a full-page ad in *The Wall Street Journal*,"[9] and throughout the 1980s and 1990s and even into the twenty-first century, she reprinted the poem whenever a reader sought advice regarding matters of gossip and reputation. During this same period Van Buren's twin sister and rival advice columnist, Eppie Lederer, better known as Ann Landers, also printed (and, often at her readers' request, frequently reprinted) a slight variation of "Nobody's Friend" under different titles, such as "Remember Me?" or "Who Am I?" At its peak, Dear Abby appeared in 1,400 papers and claimed a readership of 110 million, while Ask Ann Landers boasted 90 million readers in 1,200 papers,

making it plausible that, over the years, "Nobody's Friend" has reached an audience of potentially several million ordinary readers, many of whom carefully saved the poem and shared it with others (I first encountered the poem as a newspaper clipping stuck to my grandmother's refrigerator, where it ironically oversaw the kitchen-table gossip that punctuated family dinners).[10] More than just the most read American poem on the subject of gossip, "Nobody's Friend" in fact may be one of the most read twentieth-century American poems.

Its attitude toward gossip—and poetry's relation to gossip—is therefore instructive. What does it divulge? Taken at face value, "Nobody's Friend" offers up a rather conventional moral admonishment against gossip as a form of damaging malice. Yet the poem itself, spoken by the personified, unreliable, and disreputable "Gossip," would seem to advise against taking it at face value. In Gossip's insistence that we heed its word by avoiding that word's dangerous imperative toward repetition ("don't repeat it"), we are confronted with a version of the liar's paradox, one that strains toward resolution in the implicit split between the voice of the poem and that of the hissing snake in its garden, gossip. This split between an edifying poetry and harmful gossip threatens the poem's coherence: Gossip immediately announces its "name," only to clumsily demur, four lines later, "I have no name" (yet later that name "hisses" its return); it claims "no respect for justice" but concludes with a reverent series of questions treating justice with excessive delicacy (imagine the dreary world limited only to statements that were "true," "harmless," and "necessary"!); and it appears in this instance to warn the readers of Dear Abby against the sort of gossipy curiosity in the personal lives of others that one presumes has brought them to this advice column, and in turn this poem, in the first place.

Such contradictions ensure that if "Nobody's Friend" sets out to provide a poetic spell against gossip, it winds up unwittingly suggesting affinities between these genres' powers. Each genre asks us to construct an intimate figure of voice, a presence made out of absence. Gossip, here, both is and isn't a person: named and nameless, present yet "elusive," it is—like the figure of poetic voice—the seductive effect of words taking on a life of their own. Fittingly, the poem that Gossip voices circulates in precisely the way that Gossip describes its own circulation: as anonymous words ("to track" the never-identified author of "Nobody's Friend" down, my own efforts suggest, is, as with Gossip, "impossible") that thrive on being repeatedly "quoted" and made at once more present ("gather[ing] strength with age,"

becoming "more believed") *and* "more elusive" (to the extent that, over the years, readers of both Dear Abby and Ask Ann Landers regularly wrote to request that the poem, which had gotten under their skin yet somehow slipped away, be reprinted).[11]

The clunky machinations of voice in "Nobody's Friend" make plain its reliance on the figure of the gossip as a disavowed figure for the poet and hint at an overlapping set of interests, methods, and effects between the two genres—as if to speak in a poem might be to betray, if not outright declare, "My name is Gossip." "Nobody's Friend" is hardly unique in its anxious stance toward such a declaration; I introduce the poem here less as a curious specimen of popular culture than as an indication of the extent to which modern and contemporary poetry bears the imprint of its uneasy engagements with gossip. "Nobody's Friend" provides Van Buren, Landers, and their readers both a vivid account of and (in its putative moral correction) an alibi for the pleasures of gossip foundational to the columns and their publics. In this, it echoes a host of modern poems that assert their specificity and value against the negative example of gossip, the presentation of which often feels intended to reroute those charges leveled against idle talk away from the poems themselves.

The many and varied examples of this phenomenon that one might cite stretch from at least Romanticism to the present. They include work by William Wordsworth, who, although influentially in pursuit of a poetry of ordinary language, positions the isolated meditations of poets against the feminized gossip he calls "personal talk" in a poem that begins, "I am not One who much or oft delight / To season my fireside with personal talk, / About Friends, who live within an easy walk, / Or Neighbours, daily, weekly, in my sight."[12] Or consider—to leap ahead to the modernist period—T. S. Eliot, who in the second section of *The Waste Land* presents demotic pub gossip about Lil and her husband, Albert, in a manner that could stand as an ars poetica for the multivoiced poetics of his poem more generally. Eliot, here, is indebted to the rhythms of gossip (the passage is musically structured by its "I said," "[h]e said," and "she said" speech tags), to gossip's narrative structures (presenting a series of nested accounts as the speaker relates to her unnamed fellow gossiper what she said to Lil about what Albert had previously said to Lil), and to gossip's composite voice (the short passage consists of at least six different voices, male and female, high and low, filtered through the medium of the gossip and, ultimately, the poet). Yet, even while drawing heavily on the style and substance of gossip, the

passage condemns the gossip about Lil and Albert as a vulgar perversion of epistemological reproduction comparable to Lil's abortion and its reproductive refusal.[13]

A quite different modern poet, Edgar Lee Masters, similarly recoils against the gossip in which he indulges. Masters's best-selling 1915 volume *Spoon River Anthology*, a sequence of poems in which 244 deceased inhabitants of the invented Spoon River speak their own epitaphs, caused scandal with its airing of thinly fictionalized small-town gossip. Throughout, Masters struggles to reconcile the tension between the book's many individual poems condemning the disastrous, and in some cases even deadly, effects of village gossip and the gossipy motivation and appeal of his project itself. "Minerva Jones," for instance, directly posits poetry as remedy for gossip. Minerva, named after the virgin goddess of poetry and wisdom, recounts her brutal rape by "Butch" Weldy and subsequent death while aborting the resulting pregnancy. When she requests, "Will some one go to the village newspaper," we presume she means to share her untold story and achieve some kind of posthumous retribution—but the next line unexpectedly continues, "And gather into a book the verses I wrote?" Minerva's valorized desire to replace the gossip of village scandal with the poetry of "love" and "life" is a characteristic gesture of *Spoon River* but ultimately exactly what Masters's morbidly gossipy poems will not do: rather than ushering in "verses" that stand apart from village gossip, Minerva's wish instead initiates a series of four more poems that relate the scandal of her death and its aftermath from various perspectives, continuing the book's pattern of pursuing the gossip it repeatedly censures.[14]

In another volume of poems appearing in 1915, Robert Frost's *North of Boston*, we find what Frost described as poetic experiments with "tones of speech" that began as "no more than an almost technical interest" in his neighbors' talk but developed until he "began to suspect myself of liking their gossip for its own sake."[15] This mild suspicion of gossip's partly poetic pleasures is evident in a number of Frost's early poems, such as "A Servant to Servants," his sympathetic but wary portrait of a talky, troubled housewife humored by a politely anxious male interlocutor, or "The Housekeeper," in which the male narrator somewhat sheepishly visits the home of John and his housekeeper, Estelle, in search of gossip about their illicit romantic relationship from Estelle's mother. These poems each provide the reader with male surrogates whose dubious responses to the gossip they eagerly take in serve to absolve us, and the poems, of possibly liking gossip

for its own sake. In "The Housekeeper," for example, Estelle's mother draws the negative charge of gossip away from the poem's narrator: *he* seeks out the household's gossip like a stereotypical nosy neighbor, but *she* is depicted as a grotesque female gossip, confined to the domestic sphere or "built in here like a big church organ," as she puts it, a mere instrument to be played by those wanting news—or perhaps poetry.[16]

The apprehensive tenor of the relation between gossip and modern poetry persists into the postwar period, when we might expect to find, given the era's general loosening of perceived strictures against the personal in poetry, a more favorable embrace of idle talk. Robert Lowell's "Skunk Hour," the most famous poem from his influential 1959 volume, *Life Studies*, in fact spends its first four stanzas recounting "village" gossip—about "Nautilus Island's hermit / heiress," "our summer millionaire," and "our fairy decorator"—and its last four stanzas transforming that collective, third-person gossip about the village into a first-person disclosure of the self. Yet the poem finally compares this process of self-revelation through gossipy possession of others' privacies to a skunk rooting through the garbage for "a bite to eat," a self-incriminating figure for the postwar poet who (as with the so-called confessional poets) finds aesthetic and personal nourishment in what is perceived as humanity's trash.[17] However ambivalent this final figure and its stance toward confession, its clear stance toward gossip about others—a communal practice only seen as valuable insofar as it gives way to the individual authority of self-disclosure—continues the long-standing tendency of imagining poetry as averse to (perhaps to the extent it is in fact intimate with) gossip.

In presenting this snapshot history of modern poetry and gossip, my intention is not, as must be apparent, to exhaustively survey the relation between them. Nor is it to imply that these poets together form a single, coherent poetic tradition. Rather, I introduce the telling (and tellingly gendered) examples of Wordsworth, Eliot, Masters, Frost, and Lowell simply to suggest that the reflexive antipathy between gossip and poetry at work in a popular poem like "Nobody's Friend" indexes a more complex treatment of this seeming opposition that recurs with surprising frequency in a range of sometimes competing modern literary poetries. One further example will serve to tease out some of the key terms on which this common opposition between gossip and poetry often rests, terms that thread their way through the less antagonistic story about poetry and gossip that I propose to tell in my subsequent chapters.

Ezra Pound's well-known 1912 poem "Portrait d'une Femme" employs the extended metaphor of the Sargasso Sea to depict his titular *femme* as a gossip. The Sargasso Sea, a stretch of the North Atlantic located in a gyre and congested with seaweed, exists in the popular imagination as a mythical graveyard for lost ships and more generally as a cultural junkyard-cum-archive into which all things everywhere gradually make their way (in this, the Sargasso recalls the House of Fame, a powerful part of gossip's image repertoire that will appear throughout this study). "Your mind and you are our Sargasso Sea," Pound's speaker begins, positioning the poem's society hostess addressee as constituted by London gossip—as an entity into which, over the years, "Ideas, old gossip, oddments of all things" have "floated up" like the debris caught in the weeds of the Sargasso. This patiently collected gossip makes her, the speaker admits, "a person of some interest," "sought" out by "[g]reat minds" who "take[ ] strange gain away." Yet gossip's "strange gain"—the shipwreck of some "curious suggestion" or "[f]act that leads nowhere," perhaps "a tale or two"—is ultimately deemed useless: it "might prove useful and yet never proves." "No! there is nothing!" the poem rather emphatically concludes, "In the whole and all,/Nothing that's quite your own./Yet this is you."[18]

These final lines follow a drawn-out sentence—nearly half the poem—that luxuriates in description of the gossip's "sea-hoard of deciduous things," including "[i]dols and ambergris and rare inlays" (57). They thus attempt to subordinate the poem's, and reader's, interest in the extended metaphor's vehicle for gossip—the descriptive attention lavished on those figurative "things" swept into the domain of the gossip—to the sudden, exclamatory rejection of the value of such absorbing treasure, a rejection that at once attests to gossip's dangerous charm and underscores the poem's defensive critique of it. "Portrait d'une Femme" presents gossip as a seductively false or surface form of understanding, as unoriginal, and as a form of fragmentary knowledge indicative of a fragmentary self. Pound's gossipy society lady reduces her world's "bright ships" to "dimmed wares"; her "mind" consists of a jumble of disparate parts, mere "oddments" of "this or that" (57, 58). In possessing gossip, the poem implies, one possesses—in fact one *is*—"[n]othing that's quite your own." This stance anticipates Martin Heidegger's account of idle talk and his distinction between "what has been drawn from primordial sources with a struggle" and what is "just gossip," something "everyone can snatch up," which "divests us of the task of genuine understanding."[19] In "Portrait d'une Femme," as in Western culture more generally,

such charges take on gendered dimensions. Gossip and other denigrated rhetorical styles have long been associated with women, and feminist revaluations of gossip have shown how gossip appears pointless or trivial according to masculinist models that view reputable discourse as based in logic and abstract principles and that regard the personal, particular, domestic, and embodied as feminine and thus unimportant.[20] Along these lines, Pound's portrait refutes his subject's appeal by casting gossip as a secondary ("second always") (57), murkily material, and feminine form of knowledge and selfhood (one lacking significance, self-possession, wholeness) for which his masculine poetic authority compensates, even substitutes, confidently declaring in its closing line that "this"—a deictic pronoun that suggests in part *this poem*—"is you."

Of course, the poem itself encourages, if not outright advances, just the sort of society gossip it claims to dismiss: its portrait's real-life referent has been taken to be Florence Farr, Olivia Shakespear, or perhaps a composite of the two.[21] Further, the poem's descriptive catalogue of figurative gossip—its list of "[s]trange woods half sodden, and new brighter stuff" (57)—reads also like a figure for a modernist, collage-based poetics, a gesture toward the gathering and juxtaposition of fragments old and new as a chief strategy for modernist poetry in the tradition of Pound. As with the poets cited above, Pound's effort to define his poetry against gossip entails the disavowal of key elements of his own practice. In this way, "Portrait d'une Femme" exemplifies the tendency in modern poetry that I have set forth: an inclination to distinguish the particularity and normative value of poetry in contrast to the nonnormative discourse of gossip with which it is often quite closely engaged.

The poem also significantly intimates something about this tendency that we might call queer or, to use the near synonym preferred by "Portrait d'une Femme," something "strange" (57). The adjective "strange" appears three times in the poem, more than any other—four lines from its opening ("[s]trange spars of knowledge"), four lines from its close ("[s]trange woods half sodden"), and at its midpoint ("strange gain")—forming a prominent affective through line for our encounter with Pound's *femme*. "Strange" suggests the unusual or unfamiliar, the typical purview of gossip. It also, more specifically, suggests that which does not belong to a place or person where it is found, amplifying the unsettling, alien qualities of a gossip made up of "nothing" her "own." "Strange" can also connote sexual promiscuity or deviance—as in the phrase "strange woman," used through the nineteenth

century to describe prostitutes or otherwise promiscuous women—and something of this sexual connotation, too, lingers in the marked strangeness of the New Woman who is the subject of Pound's portrait, a creative, unconventional woman who rejects "the usual thing" of marriage and "[o]ne dull man" (57). Attacks on gossip habitually assert, as Patricia Meyer Spacks writes, "resemblances between loose talk and loose sexual conduct," and "Portrait d'une Femme" accordingly implies a resemblance between its subject's sexual alterity as a strange or odd woman and her strange collection of "gossip, oddments."[22] The surprise of the strange unsettles but also captivates; the strangeness of gossip and of the gossip presents for Pound a queer source of repulsion and fascination: "one comes to you / And takes strange gain away" (57). If, finally, Pound's portrait characteristically withdraws in contempt from its encounter with such alterity, it is also all the stranger for it, allowing us to glimpse what will be the object of my study's longer look—the queer allure of the style, sociality, and alternative forms of agency made available to poetry by gossip and the figure of the gossip.

Defining Gossip

By now one might rightfully be wondering what, precisely, do I mean by the term "gossip," and, more to the point for a study of the poetics of gossip, how do I intend to identify what is surely not quite the same thing, gossip in poetry? These questions are not merely prefatory to my discussion, something to be set forth and dispensed with; they are, as in social scientific research on gossip, central to it. Across this research, an accepted, minimal definition of "gossip" is talk about one or more absent figures.[23] In addition to requiring the absence of a discussed third party, researchers sometimes stipulate an evaluative component of gossip that serves its various social functions.[24] Ultimately, however, any effort to establish a uniform definition of "gossip" comes up against the unruly particularities of its situated contexts, and most scholars agree that context more than the content of talk proves necessary for discerning the presence of gossip.[25] Because gossip is used to establish group boundaries, separating those in the know from those out of the loop, recognizing gossip can be difficult for those unfamiliar with a given social context, its private histories and discursive repertoire. Seemingly neutral remarks about others (*Tom had lunch with his wife today*) can also be heard, for those so attuned to their situational aspects, as choice gossip (*Tom had lunch with his* wife *today*). Thus, although I take talk about

absent others as a practical, baseline definition of "gossip," in what follows I try not to presume to know in advance what counts as gossip but rather to register how gossip emerges within individual poems and how those poems themselves imagine gossip's characteristics and functions—sometimes, as we will see, in ways that contradict even our most fundamental understandings of gossip.

That gossip's meanings and effects are so often embedded in specific contexts presents challenges for understanding any modern poetics of gossip, given the pervasiveness of modernist values of literary autonomy and (especially lyric) transcendence that would abstract a poem from its social and historical circumstances. What do we mean when we call a poem gossipy? Poetry's actual or perceived lack of context makes poetic gossip something we frequently sense but have difficulty locating in specific linguistic or formal features. It also makes disambiguating markers of gossip, when they appear, even more important. Although such markers necessarily differ from poem to poem, my analysis does bring to the fore certain recurrent features of poetic gossip, which together help us to register the poem as a social space, maintained by modes of circulation and historical contexts that lyric theories tend to overlook, downplay, or even deny. Here I want to introduce a few features in particular that will become familiar by the end of this book. These features are far from comprehensive, and their poetic presence and significance varies, but they might at this point be usefully adduced both to anticipate some of what will concern my formal attention and to suggest how that attention raises broader theoretical questions whose complexity I will treat more fully in my readings of Stein, Hughes, O'Hara, and Merrill.

To be sure, the adjective "gossipy" can simply indicate content, the overt presence of the sort of subject matter to which gossip's unauthorized talk about the lives of others is drawn—private matters, frequently sexual activities or emotions. For example, when Allen Ginsberg, in his candid elegy for Frank O'Hara, recalls O'Hara "hurrying to meet" a "young poet with a big cock/who could fuck you all night long/till you never came," most readers recognize the unambiguous presence of gossip.[26] Or, to choose another example of poetic gossip in the orbit of O'Hara, there can be little doubt that the anecdote relayed by Thom Gunn in his poem "Famous Friends" presents an instance of gossip (it even appears in a section of his book, *Boss Cupid*, entitled "Gossip"). "Famous Friends" describes encountering, in "BAR on 2nd Avenue," a man named J. J. (Mitchell) who eagerly identifies himself,

"his smile triumphant," as "Frank O'Hara's last lover." Gunn vividly dishes, "it was like having met/Nell Gwynn,/on the way down, /good natured, losing weight,/still chatting about spaniels."[27]

The poetry that is my focus often contains such plainly gossipy content: Stein's work includes salon gossip about those who came to see and be seen at 27 rue de Fleurus; Hughes's poetry gives voice to the chorus of gossip arising from Harlem's stoops, street corners, and bars; O'Hara's poems name names as they dish his New York art world coterie; and Merrill's supernatural trilogy, *The Changing Light at Sandover*, details the textual and sexual lives and afterlives of a transhistorical queer literary circle that occupies both this world and the next. But beyond or even in the absence of overtly gossipy subject matter, gossip in poetry is sometimes also a matter of rhetorical style. For example, each of the poets in my study, as we will see, employs paralipsis—the self-contradictory technique by which one emphasizes or asserts what one pretends to ignore or pass over—exploiting the trope's familiar role in gossip's rhetoric (e.g., *I couldn't possibly mention how . . .* or *I would certainly never imply that . . .*).[28] Denise Duhamel's poem "Sex with a Famous Poet" presents a clear example of gossipy paralipsis, which provides a way of saying something by claiming not to be saying it. The poem recounts a dream about "sex with a famous poet" whom the speaker has met only one time, at least

> in real life, and that was in a large group
> in which I barely spoke up. He disgusted me
> with his disparaging remarks about women.
> He even used the word "Jap"
> which I took as a direct insult to my husband who's Asian.[29]

Later, the speaker acknowledges that "I know you're probably curious about who the poet is,/so I should tell you the clues I've left aren't/accurate, that I've disguised his identity,/and that you shouldn't guess *I bet it's him*. . . ."[30] Of course, this instance of paralipsis encourages the curiosity and gossipy speculation it purports to set aside or downplay: Who *is* this atrociously behaved famous poet?[31] In this manner, the poem can gossip without fully seeming to gossip. Yet this is less a matter of the sort of disavowal of dish we've seen in the case of a poet like Pound than an instance of gossip's rhetoric serving as a tool, or "mode of power," as Spacks puts it, for those deprived of agency.[32] By gossiping about an unnamed poet whom we might well wager to be any number of famous poets, the blind item of "Sex with a

Famous Poet" playfully opens up larger discussions about pervasive sexism and racism in the poetry world's institutions and power structures. The specific trope of paralipsis, in its capacity to disclose *and* conceal, here manifests a broader interest in the expressive power of forms of opacity and the productive possibilities of suspended agency that characterize the poetic gossip this book will explore.

The conspicuous presence of proper names or ambiguous personal pronouns in poetry can also serve as markers of gossip, associated equally with blunt revelation (*naming names*) and more subtle insinuation (as in *no names, please* or *you know who*). Tim Dlugos, a later-generation New York School poet in the tradition of O'Hara, exemplifies the proper name as a distillation of gossip in his poem "Tonight," ten cinquains consisting of lines that simply state a name and what that individual is doing "[t]onight" ("*May 12, 1983*" a postscript tells us). In the opening stanza, for instance, we learn that

> Barry Davidson is finishing *Remembrance of Things Past.*
> A hustler's hair and eyes blow Dennis Cooper away.
> Bo Huston comes into his inheritance.
> John Craig seems pretty stoned.
> Lanny Richman's working overtime.[33]

Here, proper names give each line's account the charge of gossip: more overtly gossipy subject matter (e.g., a man seduced by a "hustler's hair and eyes") is amplified by its attachment to a particular (and now well-known) name, while specific names lend even seemingly banal description (e.g., someone "finishing *Remembrance of Things Past*") the air of knowing implication. As Wayne Koestenbaum, discussing proper names in the poetry of Stein, writes, "The name is the tip of gossip's iceberg; each name implies a verdict, a titter, a possible condemnation," a formulation that evokes—as does "Tonight"—the gossip column's bolded names as metonyms for the items they index.[34] If naming and being named by gossip entails a fear of "possible condemnation," or "a verdict"—particularly for marginalized poets in a hostile culture who worry, like Stein, about the implications "[i]f I name names if I name names with them"[35]—it can also occasion the pleasures of recognition, publicity, and even exposure that come with making Dlugos's list and that distinguish the many proper names of O'Hara's poetry or the exclusive, A–Z seating chart for the invitation-only poetry reading that concludes *The Changing Light at Sandover* and makes material the celebrated queer literary genealogy Merrill invents throughout it. Proper names in

poems often indicate not only gossip but a negotiation of these tensions between the potential damage or delights of naming names.

Such tensions can accompany the prominent use of personal pronouns in poetry, as well. We have already seen an instance of pronouns as markers of gossip in *The Waste Land*'s pub scene, where "I said," "[h]e said," and "she said" speech tags alone create an ambient tone of gossip, imply the complex narrative structures of gossip's nested accounts, and suggest gossip's composite voice. Gossip's pronouns also, like proper names, establish boundaries, indicating presence or exclusion from its intimacies—an *us* and a *them*. In Harryette Mullen's "Elliptical," for example, it is the undesignated pronoun "they" that implies the verdicts, titters, and condemnations of gossip:

> They just can't seem to . . . They should try harder to . . . They ought to be more . . . We all wish they weren't so . . . They never . . . They always . . . Sometimes they . . . Once in a while they . . .[36]

Mullen's ellipses suggest gossip's innuendo, but more so serve to abstract gossip's rhetoric from its content, bringing to the fore those gestures, so conventional as to pass unnoticed, that allow disparaging remarks to appear benign and that are themselves freighted with meaning. Shifting our attention from what gossip says to how it says it, "Elliptical" critiques the kind of gossip that works as rote categorization, uninterested in the detail and particularity that it elides and that might complicate its foregone conclusions about a dominant "We" and subordinate "They." Taking up the same conflict but from the opposite angle, Stein in *Stanzas in Meditation* resists an ominous, ever-present "They" and their gossipy "account," while in *Montage of a Dream Deferred* Hughes describes the "'They say' . . . 'They say' . . . 'They say' . . ." of "the gossips" as a powerful arbiter of reputation.[37] Yet as we will see, these poets often find pleasure and even agency, too, in appearing in *their* apparently objectifying, exclusionary "account," such that poetic gossip's drama of pronouns, as with proper names, frequently occupies itself with a negotiation of the potentials within gossip's quite real limits.

This negotiation presents a crucial distinction between gossip and forms of talk such as dialogue or conversation. Although most scholarship on gossip favors more usefully narrow definitions of the construct, the broadest definition views it simply as small talk or chitchat, everyday conversation about social or personal topics.[38] But such a baggy definition of gossip makes it difficult to differentiate it from related forms of talk. Thus, while at times I will use synonyms or slang terms for gossip such as "idle talk" or "dish," and

I will at times want to consider each poet's gossip within the context of other forms of talk or even as a figure for various forms of unofficial meaning making, throughout my analyses I maintain a distinction between gossip and conversation. When Stein's, Hughes's, O'Hara's, and Merrill's poetic gossip has been addressed, it typically, as I will show, has been subsumed within broader discussions of talk, dialogue, or conversation. But a prevailing critical emphasis on conversational mutuality and manners tends to efface both the difficulties and the pleasures of gossip's naming names and its unauthorized appropriations, exclusions, and use of others, often imagining a stabilizing parity for poetic talk that is in fact characterized by rapid shifts and disparities in agency. All gossip is a type of conversation, but not all conversation is gossip. Unlike the ideals of decorum and mutuality understood to govern conversation, gossip depends on an absent other whose necessary exclusion from the scene of gossip enables its intimacies. Gossip thrives on its (sometimes charmingly) bad manners and hierarchical play; its authority obtains in speaking *of* as much as *to* others. Yet, conversely, for the poets I consider, gossip's objectifying talk also strangely animates its objects' agency. To read their poetic gossip as conversation obscures both gossip's potential for enforcing normative hierarchies and, quite differently, the way that gossip, unlike conversation, connotes a potential queerness, a pleasurable, world-making investment in the nonnormative. I seek to show how the twentieth century's most innovative poetic representations and enactments of gossip significantly engage the tension between its potential normativity and its potential queerness.

Lyric Gossip

I began this introduction by invoking commonplace notions of the lyric as solitary, personal expression, yet, like gossip, what we mean by "lyric" is—though often presumed—subject to ongoing debate. Recently, scholars in the field of historical poetics, or what has sometimes been labeled the "new lyric studies," have developed and extended long-standing arguments that what we call the lyric is not a transhistorical genre but rather the product of "lyric reading," a set of normative interpretive practices consolidated over the course of the twentieth century.[39] These practices assign qualities now identified with the lyric—namely the fiction of an abstract, isolated, expressive speaking voice—to a wide variety of poems by decontextualizing them from their historical and social environments. Virginia Jackson describes how, as critics associated with the New Criticism differently took up such

practices and instilled them in American universities, "a broad idea of the lyric became exemplary for the reading of all poetry," in turn influencing "the way poems were written."[40] Indeed, Jackson contends, "it remains the normative model for the production and reception of most poetry."[41] Emphasizing production over reception, I examine the work of Stein, Hughes, O'Hara, and Merrill against the unfolding history of twentieth-century lyric reading, demonstrating how their poems not only engage this contemporaneous history but also themselves theorize the lyric genre, forming part of what Jackson describes as the ongoing, "collective project of invention" that is the lyric.[42] In a series of historically situated close readings that move between synchronic contexts and diachronic effects, I identify in their poetry an alternative to lyric reading that I term *lyric gossip*: a knowing effort to reimagine emerging critical ideals of the lyric by creatively inhabiting them as a source of poetic possibility.

This effort plays out in a number of ways. In *Stanzas in Meditation*, Stein restages the scene of lyric address by cultivating surprising affinities between gossip's objectifying "They" and lyric's paradigmatic, overhearing auditors. In *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, Hughes locates poetic voice in a gossipy obscurity that cannot be subsumed by the demands of intelligibility, at once resisting reductive assumptions about the transparency of minority lives and writing and asking us to revalue the modern lyric subject and its exclusionary ideal of transparent universality. O'Hara complicates understandings of lyric utterance as belonging to a fictive speaker by advancing instead a poetics of gossip and a lyric talker. And in *The Changing Light at Sandover*, gossip provides Merrill with a method and motivation for his poem's provocative sounding of the problem of tone and the queer possibilities, as much as limits, of the lyric interiority that tone is taken to indicate. Lyric address, voice, speaker, tone: in the hands of each poet, the situated style and social practices of gossip clarify, trouble, and rework these foundational, interrelated elements of the modern lyric, in the process reframing questions of individual agency and relationality central to debates about poetic self-fashioning. Put another way, these poets engage, through their poetry, in self-reflexive gossip about the status and workings of the lyric genre itself.

It is worth stressing that "lyric gossip" does not mean that I understand the poems at the center of my arguments about gossip's role in modern and contemporary poetry to *be* lyric, however one might define it. Although critics have occasionally made the case—perhaps unsurprisingly from the standpoint of a history of lyric reading—for each of these poems as (whether

in whole or in part) lyric, the sheer length of Stein's *Stanzas in Meditation* (192 pages), Hughes's *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (51 pages), and Merrill's *The Changing Light at Sandover* (560 pages) strains against even the most capacious definitions of the genre. O'Hara, meanwhile, antagonized the poetry world and conceptions of the lyric's transcendent universalism with his seemingly antipoetic poems and their garrulous rush of stubborn particulars. My concern is not whether these poems fit some available definition of the lyric (in most cases, they probably would not) but rather, as Jonathan Culler writes in a defense of lyric as an interpretive category, "whether approaching a given poem or poetic corpus in relation [to] the lyric tradition enriches the experience of and reflection on the poems in question" or "to what extent reference to the parameters of that tradition are presupposed—as something to be cited, parodied, deployed, denounced, or worked against."[43] While not, for the most part, "lyric" in any traditional sense, the quite different poetries of Stein, Hughes, O'Hara, and Merrill draw on, depart from, and otherwise contend with coexistent norms of lyric reading that became dominant over the course of the twentieth century and that shaped the reception of poetry, including their own.

It is worth stressing, too, that "lyric gossip" does not mean that I understand the poems at the center of my study and their gossip about the modern lyric genre to be *anti-lyric* in the tradition of avant-garde poetries ranging from experimental modernisms to the theoretically informed poetries of the 1970s—poetries that, in rejecting lyric reading's assumptions of voice and an expressive lyric subjectivity, may nonetheless shore up the conventions of lyric reading they oppose.[44] I instead want to consider how poems might, as Gillian White writes, "register resistances to lyricizing readings of them without taking on the premises of avant-garde antilyricism."[45] What I call lyric gossip may appear to advance a disruptive (if now familiar) critique of the lyric—an effort to expose its naturalized protocols and their potentially damaging implications and effects—and in some sense it does. But, more than such critique, I argue that the lyric gossip of queer poets like Stein, Hughes, O'Hara, and Merrill evinces a nonoppositional relation to the lyric that confounds the lyric/anti-lyric binary that continues to structure debates in poetic theory. Beyond critique, I am interested in how poets may also be motivated, in taking up the lyric, by what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick terms "a reparative impulse," the desire of which is, rather than a suspicious stripping away of illusion in service of exposure, "additive and accretive. Its fear, a realistic one, is that the culture surrounding it is inadequate or inimical to its nur-

ture; it wants to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer to an inchoate self."[46] The poets I consider each want to inhabit and reimagine—without exactly rejecting—lyric norms, summoning the affective resources that a flurry of reading practices have put in circulation around the variously idealized and disparaged lyric object as they pursue one of what Sedgwick identifies as "the many ways selves and communities succeed in exacting sustenance from the objects of a culture—even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them."[47]

Queer Gossip

Throughout this study, I situate the foregoing formal and generic questions in queer cultural contexts where the vexed issues of reputation, sexual identity, and style coalesce around both the idiom and figure of the gossip. Of course, not all gossip is queer but all gossip, by virtue of its motivating interest in the nonnormative, potentially entails queer effects. The poets in my study actively seek such effects. Aware of how gossip can serve as a vital counter to official discourse, and how even repressive gossip can become a vehicle for queer performance, these poets take the gossip that surrounds them as a source of inspiration and formal model. Their work shares an investment in poetic self-fashioning. Yet Stein, Hughes, O'Hara, and Merrill each recalibrate the poetics and politics of lyric selfhood by grounding it not in a subject's autonomous self-expression, as modern ideas of the lyric would lead us to expect, but instead in the ambiguous or suspended agency effected by gossip's winged words. Their lyric gossip draws on the queer experience of dish as they pursue the fraught pleasures and uncertain agency of gossip's objectifying talk about others and the vivifying anticipation of in turn becoming the object of gossip oneself—as if to be, for these poets, is to be gossiped about.

Placing these poetic experiments in queer historical contexts (whether Stein's Paris salon and the literary and sexual gossip it exuded, the speculation surrounding Hughes's opaque sexuality both within and beyond his Harlem community, O'Hara's negotiation of the Cold War sexual suspicion often attached to the queer and the poet, or Merrill's post-Stonewall return to this moment and the raw material of the 1950s Lavender Scare) allows us to see where modern theories of the lyric and the poems that reflect, exceed, resist, or correct them have been steeped in broader cultural idioms—and thus to understand how poetry's formal properties and not simply its

thematic content present a necessary part of the historical record.[48] In my discussions of each poet, the problem of privacy emerges as a crucial node for this interchange of poetic form and social and historical influence. Their work invites us to register, amid the noise of all that separates ideas of lyric, gossip, and queerness, the resonant conceptions of a publicly circulating privacy that disclose a productive affinity between them.

The modern idea of the lyric as a privacy that paradoxically circulates in public—an overheard utterance—finds its most potent expression in Mill's aforementioned 1833 essay, "What Is Poetry?" Here, Mill confronts the apparent contradiction of an idealized lyric solitude that one encounters "printed on hot-pressed paper and sold at a bookseller's shop" by venturing a figure for this publicly circulating privacy: such poetry "is a soliloquy in full dress, and on the stage," performing for an assumed, but unacknowledged, audience.[49] This conception of the lyric as a performance of privacy, one that "know[s] that other eyes are upon us" but must somehow admit "no trace of consciousness that any eyes are upon us," has played a central part in most subsequent accounts of the lyric, although they often emphasize lyric's "overheard," private solitude and downplay its performance, or how that privacy takes place in public and coyly solicits public attention.[50] In Mill's odd figure, the lyric is less a matter of the private solitude typically ascribed to the genre than a way—one of the twentieth century's most significant ways, I would argue—of mediating the private and the public.

In this sense, gossip seems not incompatible but weirdly allied with modern understandings of the lyric. Although frequently discussed as a private, *just between us* mode, more accurately gossip—like, for all their obvious differences, the Mill-based version of the lyric—mediates privacy and publicity. Gossip's knowledge of or speculation about the private circulates publicly, restaging its intimate scenes in new and often increasingly public contexts and entailing, as Spacks writes, a "blurring of a line that we prefer to keep distinct."[51] In the twentieth century such blurring has often been a queer project, and in occupying this liminal space between the private and public, intimacy and strangeness, gossip has served as one of the unofficial, ephemeral, or proscribed practices that elaborate and sustain queer worlds. As Henry Abelove writes, "Gossip is illicit speculation, information, knowledge" that "circulates in subterranean ways and touches on matters hard to grasp and of crucial concern"; its "illicit" epistemology and subcultural transmission make it "an indispensable resource for those who are in any sense or

measure disempowered."[52] Such use of gossip points toward the broader problem of privacy and queerness—another mode that, like the lyric and gossip, occupies the contradictions of privacy and publicity. For modern queer people, living in an era when public and private speech are structured—as Sedgwick has powerfully argued—by the logics of the closet, "publicness," Michael Warner writes, "will feel like exposure, and privacy will feel like the closet." In fact, he contends, homosexuals "have neither privacy *nor* publicness, in . . . normative senses of the terms."[53] A poet working under these conditions, in which the stakes of performing privacy dramatically increase, may perceive—like Stein, Hughes, O'Hara, and Merrill—lyric's and gossip's forms of publicly circulating privacy to be, or potentially to be, in dynamic, queer relation.[54]

Gossip's checkered history in twentieth-century America provides a particularly rich context for exploring the relationship between modern understandings of the lyric and modern forms of sexuality. If the first half of the past century presents a parallel history of poetry's uneasy codification as lyric and of the uneasy codification of modern sexual identities, gossip suggestively blurs these two histories, most evidently—as I later explore in more detail—in the McCarthy era's gossipy conflation of the queer, the un-American, and the artist. Of the works I consider, only Hughes's and O'Hara's are composed in the midst of the postwar culture of heightened suspicion surrounding sexual and artistic identity. Yet *Stanzas in Meditation*, written in 1932, and *The Changing Light at Sandover*, the first installment of which was not published until 1976, are each also indelibly colored by this period in American history toward which they reach—whether forward or backward. The source material for *Sandover*, like the queer experience it narrates, dates from 1953, and Merrill's trilogy challenges and finds pleasure within the gossip-laden, Cold War unease that haunts his poem. Stein's *Stanzas*, meanwhile, was not published until 1956, when its reception by poets like John Ashbery drew out its interest in how gossip initially fueled by phobic sexual suspicion can paradoxically limn queer possibility. Compare the opening lines of *Stanzas*—

> I caught a bird which made a ball
> And they thought better of it.
> But it is all of which they taught
> That they were in a hurry yet
> In a kind of way they meant it best[55]

—with those of Ashbery's pronoun-filled poem about gossip, homosexuality, and the McCarthy era, "The Grapevine" (from his 1956 volume *Some Trees*):

> Of who we and all they are
> You all now know. But you know
> After they began to find us out we grew
> Before they died thinking us the causes
>
> Of their acts.[56]

Read through the anachronistic lens of Ashbery's midcentury grapevine (a "word-of-mouth network of 'fruits,'" as John Shoptaw puts it),[57] *Stanzas* becomes a central text for the lyric gossip that flourishes in American poetry during the 1950s and 1960s and its queer negotiation of the demands of a multivalent, overhearing "they."[58]

In framing my study's understanding of queer gossip, I should clarify that by "queer" I mean not so much the expression or representation of gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender identities as the baffling of sexual or gender identity categories and of normative categorization more broadly. The "rich, unsystematic resources" of what Sedgwick calls the "nonce-taxonomic work represented by gossip" hold out precisely this potential for a more nuanced account of gender, sexuality, and desire than identity categories tend to offer, and in this sense gossip enables the queer energies of Stein's, Hughes's, O'Hara's, and Merrill's gossip and its makeshift maneuvering through social and poetic convention.[59] Many of gossip's queer effects—of, for instance, fleeting, unauthorized spaces and subjectivities—derive from its status as both a performance in the theatrical sense and as performative in the sense of speech act theory and the theories of performativity drawn from it. Numerous theorists of gossip point out that it involves a kind of theatrical performance: "Think of it as drama," writes Spacks. "Two characters . . . speaking the language of shared experience, revealing themselves as they talk of others, constructing a joint narrative—a narrative that conjures up yet other actors, offstage, playing out their own private dramas."[60] Gossip is also performative, its language often depicted as self-actualizing, setting in motion what it ostensibly describes. Its characterization as autonomous language out of control garners generally poor reviews (think of the World War II slogans warning against gossip: "careless talk costs lives" and "loose lips sink ships"), but, from another perspective, gossip's ability to meld saying and doing suggests a vital source of transformative, nonnormative energy.

The idea of gossip as both performance and performativity informs my analysis of lyric gossip as a queer form of aesthetic self-fashioning, and in the chapters that follow I read in Stein's, Hughes's, O'Hara's, and Merrill's work a performance of sexuality that takes place largely at the level of poetic style. Wayne Koestenbaum emphasizes gossip's queer performativity and the way it can loosen more fixed gender or sexual identities when he writes, "Gossip, hardly trivial, is as central to gay culture as it is to female cultures. From skeins of hearsay, I weave an inner life, I build queerness. . . ."[61] If by "queerness" one means primarily the avoidance or dismantling of identity categories, to "build queerness" might seem a paradox. Indeed, if we consider the concept of "nonce taxonomy" Sedgwick advances in *Epistemology of the Closet*, it might seem an appropriate one. In a passage to which my study will recur, Sedgwick introduces gossip as her primary example of nonce taxonomy, a project that seeks to create "space for asking or thinking in detail about the multiple, unstable ways in which people may be like or different from each other." She writes:

> Probably everybody who survives at all has reasonably rich, unsystematic resources of nonce taxonomy for mapping out the possibilities, dangers, and stimulations of their human social landscape. It is probably people with the experience of oppression or subordination who have most *need* to know [how "people may be like or different from each other"]; and I take the precious, devalued arts of gossip, immemorially associated in European thought with servants, with effeminate and gay men, with all women, to have to do not even so much with the transmission of necessary news as with the refinement of necessary skills for making, testing, and using unrationalized and provisional hypotheses about what *kinds of people* there are to be found in one's world.[62]

Sedgwick is careful to note that gossip is not an essentially female or gay discourse, although historically women and gay men have been "peculiarly disserved by its devaluation."[63] Instead, gossip, for Sedgwick, represents a way of building queerness in all its one-time-only nuance, of meeting "one's descriptive requirements that the piercing bouquet of a given friend's particularity be done some justice."[64]

Sedgwick's nonce taxonomy shares deep affinities with Roland Barthes's concept of the Neutral, which emerges throughout his body of work but most extensively in the series of lectures he gave at the Collège de France in 1977–1978. Barthes sees the elaboration of the Neutral as an aesthetic and "ethical project" that, like Sedgwick's anti-homophobic inquiry, proposes

a manner of eluding the binary thinking that limits and deforms what counts as knowledge in Western discourse. Like Sedgwick, he declares, "I want to live according to nuance."[65] The Neutral, that which "outplays" and "baffles the paradigm," is his way of doing so, his "*style* of being present to the struggles of my time."[66] This ethics of style offers "the nonviolent refusal of reduction, the parrying of generality by inventive, unexpected, nonparadigmatizable behavior, the elegant and discreet flight in the face of dogmatism."[67] Yet gossip, for Barthes, would seem to be the anti-Neutral. In *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, he writes, "Saying 'he' about someone, I always envision a kind of murder by language, whose entire scene, sometimes sumptuous, even ceremonial, is *gossip*."[68] Sedgwick's gossip conjures "the piercing bouquet of a given friend's particularity"; Barthes's gossip violently fits its subjects into general categories. In a fragment entitled "Gossip" in *A Lover's Discourse*, Barthes writes further that gossip "takes possession of my other and restores that other to me in the bloodless form of a universal substitute."[69] So much for nuance!

In Sedgwick and Barthes we find versions of the two typical views of gossip's ethics. Gossip as nonce taxonomy recalls the view that (as Robert F. Goodman puts it) "the sort of moral judgments made by gossipers cannot be separated from the specifics of particular cases. So enmeshed are such moral determinations in detail that they cannot be fit neatly into a unified moral system or easily generated to other cases." Gossip as a form of "universal substitute" suggests the view that "a primary emphasis of gossip is upon instances of trespass against a community's norms. A primary purpose of gossip is to sustain those norms, not to make fine-tuned judgments of every case."[70] In introducing these two views, my aim is not to set forth for gossip the kind of subversive/hegemonic, structuring binary against which both Sedgwick and Barthes work but rather to think about how they may be much the same view, differently inflected. Sedgwick is attuned to the ways nonce taxonomy is always threatening to get stuck, to become rote, normalizing taxonomy; and, however much Barthes wants to attack gossip, his lingering on its "sumptuous, even ceremonial" qualities suggests a concurrent investment in its stylistic and erotic potential, and how one may find nuance within discourses that can tend toward troubling generality.

Between Sedgwick and Barthes, then, one might piece together a fuller theoretical account of gossip's queer aesthetics and ethics. Although my project leans, like its objects of study, toward an affirmative account of gossip, within the poems I consider, gossip is never neatly valorized or castigated,

and its queer pleasures are inseparable from its real risks. Much of the scholarship on gossip seems caught up in a repressive hypothesis, certain that gossip, a liberating discourse of the subordinated, has been maligned and repressed precisely because of the threat it poses to the status quo. As useful as this work can be, the critical insistence on, as the title of one collection of essays declares, *Good Gossip*, or (per its first essay's title) "The Vindication of Gossip," can at times seem reductively to declare that *tomorrow gossip will be good again*. The poets in my study, faced with phobic networks of suspicion and knowingness that implicate and conscript them, cannot celebrate gossip in this way, instead adopting it as a discourse that inherently neither subverts nor reinforces power, but that one might take up for any number of purposes. Whether in the dizzying shifts Stein makes between the first and third person, Hughes's transformation of the effacement of social obscurity into a boldly obscure assertion of personhood, the ambiguous subjective or objective status of O'Hara's gossip about himself, or Merrill's becoming a medium for the gossipy voices of other worlds, each of these poets plays with gossip's distinct ability to slide back and forth between subjectivity and objectivity, pleasurable particularity and violent generalization. In so doing, their poems nourish the formal space between subject and object, a space of suspended agency that Barthes might see as the theatrical space of gossip and its violent "scene," or Sedgwick might call a "space for asking or thinking in detail about the multiple, unstable ways in which people may be like or different from each other." Stein's, Hughes's, O'Hara's, and Merrill's shared fascination with this space suggests a familiarity with the deprivations of being objectified and an attendant queer ambivalence toward the powers and aesthetic of autonomous selfhood so often accorded to the modern lyric poem.

Reading Gossip

In this book I seek to contribute such crucial queer perspectives to current lyric studies and its renewed scholarly debate over the practices and forms of lyric poetry. More than simply mapping a curious poetic mode, I want to present new and illuminating queer contexts for understanding the influential formal achievements of Stein, Hughes, O'Hara, and Merrill, and to uncover the unexpected ways that the history of the modern lyric intertwines with histories of sexuality.

The poets who are my points of focus are queer and have been associated with gossip. Other connections exist among them: Stein and Hughes

shared a close mutual friend and literary champion in Carl Van Vechten; O'Hara studied and admired Stein's work and wrote, like his fellow New Yorker Hughes, poems that document the daily experience of moving through the city's streets; Merrill enjoyed a correspondence with Alice B. Toklas and prominently featured Toklas and Stein in his Ouija world, and he personally knew and moved in and out of the same New York literary and gay social circles as O'Hara, who received a grant from Merrill's Ingram Merrill Foundation. Yet none of these poets were, ultimately, closely affiliated, and their poems present a disparate array of styles—from the avowedly experimental to supposedly mainstream, from the famously difficult to the deceptively simple—and a wide range of subject matters and concerns. What follows, then, is not an analysis of gossip's part in a particular coterie or community or school. While individual chapters examine specific sociohistorical contexts for each poet's use of gossip, in sum they tell a story about gossip and lyric that moves across such contexts. By departing from the critical tendency to organize the study of American poetry principally in relation to schools of verse, my emphasis on gossip constellates twentieth-century American poetry anew by telling tales out of school, as it were—establishing, if not quite an alternative genealogy of American poetry, a network of more modest but no less significant queer affinities among poets of seemingly dissimilar styles and movements.

I track this network through four case studies centering on the relationship between poetic form and social forms. In their close attention to form, subjectivity, and sociohistorical context, these studies take queer gossip, with its keen and equal interests in the nuances of style, selfhood, and the social, as both methodological model and object of study. Each chapter examines a principal feature of modern lyric poetry and the distinctive social conditions that inform the given poet's queer revaluation of that feature. Chapter 1 focuses on the figure of poetic address, chapter 2 on the figure of poetic voice, chapter 3 on the critical concept of the poetic speaker, and chapter 4 on the concept of poetic tone. This is not to suggest that address, voice, speaker, and tone operate discretely: for twentieth-century lyric readers, the presumption of a speaker, for example, produces the search for voice and tone, and structures of address can shore up or complicate the figure of voice. Although each chapter foregrounds a distinct element of the lyric to explore how it has been theorized both by scholars and the poet at hand, my readings are necessarily less neat than this structuring device might suggest, inevitably entailing a consideration of each interrelated element of the

lyric. So, too, my discussion of address in Stein speaks to my reading of O'Hara, my consideration of voice in Hughes resonates with my ideas about tone in Merrill, and so on. It is together that these chapters reveal how queerness has enabled (and sometimes necessitated) poetic invention and, in turn, how lyric gossip has powerfully expressed and engendered queer sensibilities.

My first chapter, "'They Will Tell Well': Gertrude Stein, Address, and Gossip," begins by challenging the familiar dismissal of gossip as an overly accessible and therefore shallow literary mode by examining gossip's role in Stein's notoriously difficult writing. The gossip accepted as characteristic of Stein's personality and popular style has not received sustained critical attention; moreover, her more obviously experimental work—in its supposed tight-lipped refusal to offer up gossip—is often positioned as critiquing and so redeeming the loose talk of her relatively accessible texts. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and the long, difficult poem *Stanzas in Meditation*, each composed in late 1932, have provided an exemplary pairing for this critical narrative. In this oft-repeated story, *The Autobiography* becomes paradigmatic of Stein's gossipy, popular writing, while *Stanzas* represents just the opposite, an abstract, obdurately self-enclosed meditation, the lyric antidote to *The Autobiography*'s poison pen. Yet the demands of *Stanzas* include an endlessly chatty speaker who enjoys the tone, rhetorical gestures, and pronominal dramatis personae of gossip. Tracking the unacknowledged gossipy impulses of Stein's poem in relation to its more frequently noted lyric ones, I argue that Stein's meditation on gossip and its constitutive, objectifying I/They relationship proves central to her seemingly conflicting meditation on—and queer reimagining of—the parts played by the I and You of lyric address and its traditionally unacknowledged auditors.

Chapter 2, "'Ain't You Heard?': Langston Hughes's Queer Gossip," turns to Hughes to further consider the possibilities at work in taking gossip's social obscurity—rather than its presumed accessibility as a literary style—as a queer model for poetic voice. The chapter focuses on Hughes's 1951 book-length poetic sequence *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, which both begins and ends with an enticement to gossip—"Ain't you heard?"—and in the interim stages a dishy, multivoiced repertoire of suggestive talk and bebop noise.[71] In *Montage*, I argue, Hughes employs gossip as a way of recording the social rhythms of black culture in postwar Harlem, particularly as they frustrate standard forms of legibility or attention and resist normative ideals of respectability. In giving voice to gossip about and by Harlem's "people of

the night"[72]—queer figures relegated to social obscurity by racial difference, class marginality, nonnormative sexuality, gender nonconformity, or some intersection of these elements—Hughes preserves the aesthetic and ethical values of both their dissonant rhythms and his own identification with them. Indeed, although Hughes is well known as a poet of simplicity, I contend that it is through the social and verbal obscurity of gossip, bebop jazz, and queerness that he performs his own elusive poetic voice in *Montage.* To this end, I analyze a series of neglected vernacular moments in the poem that are not simple or transparent, as readers so often note of Hughes, but instead explicitly obscure. My analysis shows how Hughes highlights the shared opacity and inventiveness of bop idiom, gossip, and lyric poetry, each a kind of private language that stands askew to the wider world but promises alternative pleasures to its initiates. Less a failure of meaning than a queer form of it, gossipy obscurity in *Montage* provides Hughes a way of transforming the damaging effacements of social obscurity into a defiantly obscure assertion of community, voice, and personhood.

In chapter 3, "'The Dish That's Art': Frank O'Hara's Self-Gossip," I reframe the relationship between Cold War culture and lyric poetry in terms of gossip. An emphasis on confession and confessional culture has dominated understandings of midcentury poetry, especially in relation to changing perceptions of privacy, subjectivity, sexuality, and style. Yet O'Hara's poetry usefully reminds us that the era of McCarthyism and *Confidential* magazine was as much one of gossip as confession: "I am/nourished by the/shabbiness of my/knowing so much/about others and what/they do," O'Hara writes.[73] Certainly, confession can be gossipy, and gossip can be in turn a form of confession. O'Hara's poetic gossip is always a kind of self-gossip, a performance of the self ambivalently rooted, like confession and confessional poetics, in both negative affect and pleasure. Nevertheless, this self-gossip becomes for O'Hara a queer method of poetic self-fashioning that presents an alternative both to confession and to New Critical ideals of lyric subjectivity. Reading gossip's part in the formal and social logics of O'Hara's poetry, I show how, in eschewing authorized self-disclosure for unauthorized talk about others (including the self *as* other), O'Hara's poetry necessitates a subtle yet significant change of emphasis from confession to gossip. Such a change enables an attendant shift in our thinking about postwar poetics: from the power structures and agency of confessional practice to those of intimate dish and coterie chatter, from the critical concept of the poetic speaker to the notion of a lyric talker, from the confessional construc-

tion of modern subjectivities to gossipy self-making, and from Cold War anxiety to queer pleasures.

My final chapter, "'The Celestial Salon': James Merrill and the Afterlife of Gossip," takes up the lingering effects of McCarthy-era gossip, moving beyond the common characterization of gossip as merely ephemeral as I explore instead its queer afterlives in contemporary poetry. Merrill's sprawling verse epic, *The Changing Light at Sandover*, details nearly thirty years of gossipy Ouija board communications, conducted alongside his partner, David Jackson, with deceased friends, poetic luminaries, and a vast array of spirits. Merrill, I contend, indulges in the Ouija's "backstage gossip" both to establish a queer relationship to poetic tradition and to confront the pervasive menace of the Cold War discourse of the Lavender Scare, which haunts the trilogy's 1950s origins.[74] This discourse would position queerness as a figure for the nonreproductive and antisocial, in part by blurring nuclear and sexual threat. In *Sandover*, the reproduction of gossip establishes affiliations that recast a postnuclear fear of annihilation in terms of the domestic sphere and a queer, postnuclear family, building a utopian vision out of the unstable economy of queer reproduction central to America's Cold War unease. This gossipy retelling of the widespread cultural narrative that equates homosexuality with the dissolution of the social both opens onto and partially arises from the problem of tone: the aesthetic and ethical question, predominant in postwar poetry and poetics, of how—if at all—one understands others' interiorities and communicates one's own. In *Sandover*, Merrill uses the art of gossip to theorize and deploy tone, enabling hypotheses about otherworldly selves whose interiorities are never certain, but no less powerful for that. His Ouija poem brashly demystifies lyric's subjective interiority even as its gossip preserves this interiority as a resonant, lasting queer space for unanticipated selves.

A coda adds one last word on the future of lyric gossip. Working within the dense thicket of language and information produced by technologies such as the Internet and the smartphone, twenty-first-century poets have exhibited a wide-ranging interest in creating poems out of other people's words. These poets mirror in their poems the challenges—to originality, to the individual voice, to privacy, to decorum—faced by anyone living amid this vast quantity of talk and text, and they turn to the figure of the gossip to think through the stakes of tapping into communal, mediated language. In brief readings of writing by the poets Juliana Spahr, John Keene, Eileen Myles, and D. A. Powell that engages the gossipy poetics of Stein, Hughes,

O'Hara, and Merrill, I argue that the nexus of lyric, gossip, and queerness at work in poetry that contends with this century's crowded linguistic archive represents the latest transformation of the lyric gossip traced throughout my study. Rather than creating a wholly new aesthetic for the digital era, these writers' innovative work memorably enters into, extends, and helps to illuminate a long-standing network of modern and contemporary poets drawing on gossip and gossip-related speech practices to reimagine what a seemingly moribund lyric poetry is and all of the queer things it still might do.

1 "They Will Tell Well"
Gertrude Stein, Address, and Gossip

Once now I will tell all which they tell lightly.
Gertrude Stein, *Stanzas in Meditation*

"A Considerable Display of Sordid Anecdotes"

Gertrude Stein was a gossip. You didn't hear it here first. It is hardly fresh news to assert that Stein, chatty doyenne of 27 rue de Fleurus, had a taste for dish and even less juicy to remark that modernist dish had a decided taste for her. In his 1914 essay instructing the public "how to read Gertrude Stein," Carl Van Vechten lovingly emphasizes both "Miss Stein's piquant love of gossip" *and* gossipy details about her "personality," "physique," "garb," and salon; elsewhere, he positions her writing itself as gossip that insinuates its author's position as "founder" and foremost figure of "the modern movement in English literature": "With the publication of *Three Lives*," he writes, "her gossip was disseminated."[1] The 1932 publication of the bestselling *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* confirmed and consolidated Stein's reputations as a gossip and a writer, ensuring that her fame during her lifetime would have as much to do with the gossip swirling around (and emanating from) her formidable personality as it would with her gossipy and gossiped-about work. In a eulogy for Stein, Van Vechten claims that "in the work of Gertrude Stein her conversation pieces mixed with her landscape, her gossip with her lectures," reasserting his sense that her gossip cannot be considered distinct from her more explicitly literary endeavors.[2] Yet even as Stein's celebrity has become intertwined with gossip, her readers have often labored to make just such a distinction between "her gossip" and "the work." We have had critical accounts of the "landscape" and "lectures," important studies of Stein and dialogue, and even discussion of Stein's "conversation"—

but the insistent presence of gossip in Stein's writing still has not received sustained critical consideration.

Why this odd gap in Stein scholarship? Despite Van Vechten's example, Stein's earliest critics almost uniformly denounced her "piquant love of gossip." *Testimony against Gertrude Stein*, a collection of testy rejoinders to *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, published in 1935 as a special supplement to *Transition*, set the terms for one strand of subsequent devaluations of Stein's gossip. I will have more to say later about this pamphlet, in which Georges Braque, Eugene and Maria Jolas, Henri Matisse, André Salmon, and Tristan Tzara muster an impressive supply of outrage and counter-gossip in order to perform mostly trivial factual corrections (e.g., "this incident took place Boulevard des Invalides, not in Clamart").[3] For now, I want simply to point toward its "unanimity of opinion that [Stein] had no understanding of what really was happening around her, that the mutation of ideas beneath the surface of the more obvious contacts and clashes of personalities during that period escaped her entirely," and to Tristan Tzara's characteristic complaint that, in Stein's gossipy, surface-level staging of these "clashes of personalities," "we witness a considerable display of sordid anecdotes destined to make us believe that Miss Gertrude Stein is in reality a genius."[4] Two decades later, in his critical hatchet job *Art by Subtraction: A Dissenting Opinion of Gertrude Stein*, B. L. Reid cites such invective in asserting that Stein's "gossip is character revealing in a rather disastrous way, for it often proves to be grossly inaccurate."[5] Echoing the claim that she fails to apprehend "ideas beneath the surface" and thus fails to dazzle us into believing her a "genius," Reid asserts that Stein's "autobiographical books" are "by and large . . . chitchat—engrossing as the gossip of an alert and powerful personality" but never "deeper than chitchat level."[6]

If antagonistic critics such as Reid seem to declare of Stein's more immediately accessible work that *there's nothing more to it than gossip!*, the many champions of this work have tended to take the opposite tack, proclaiming, *there's so much more to it than gossip!* These seemingly contradictory positions significantly share a sense of literary value as "deeper than chitchat." Thus, in his review in the *New York Herald-Tribune*, Stein's friend Louis Bromfield celebrates *The Autobiography* but warns there is "no use in quoting amusing anecdotes or bits of gossip from the book. These are things which any one can put on paper when he comes to write his autobiography, whether he has ever written a word before or not."[7] Similarly, in a favorable review in the *Nation*, William Troy notes that *The Autobiography* "can be enjoyed for

its gossip, its fund of wit and anecdotes" but worries that, "read in this way," it will "provide inexhaustible fodder for the newspaper reviewers and abundant, if somewhat superficial, enjoyment for a large section of the reading public. Indeed, it is all too tempting to plunder some of its rarer bits for the purposes of this review; to repeat what Miss Stein has to say."[8] Both Bromfield and Troy bear witness, no less than Tzara or Reid, to Stein's "considerable display of sordid anecdotes." Lest this dish's "somewhat superficial" pleasures prove "all too tempting" to the critic and potential gossip, one must resist "quoting" its "anecdotes," or "repeat[ing] what Miss Stein has to say." *The Autobiography*, here, is of interest, but in spite of rather than because of its gossip. When Richard Bridgman laments that *The Autobiography* "is regarded as gossip, pleasant to read but undeserving of serious critical attention" or Marjorie Perloff insists that it and *Everybody's Autobiography* "are, in fact, anything but the straightforward, anecdotal memoirs that readers, in search of good gossip . . . take them to be," we see that even the sharpest and most sympathetic readers of Stein's popular texts have tended brusquely to move past gossip, as if it were a frivolous, inconsequential aspect of her work proper and a distraction from any real estimation of the work's value.[9]

A variation of this response to Stein's gossip has been to see it as evidence of the degree to which the text at hand has capitulated to the expectations of a middlebrow reading public and in so doing strayed from the so-called real work found in her more forbiddingly difficult, experimental writing. In this view, the gossip accepted as characteristic of Stein's personality and popular mode is understood to have little to do with the body of work written not for an audience but for herself, and this work—in its supposed tight-lipped refusal to offer up gossip—is in turn often positioned as critiquing and so redeeming the loose talk of her popular texts. *The Autobiography* and *Stanzas in Meditation*, composed during the summer and fall of 1932, have provided scholars with an exemplary pairing for this critical narrative: *The Autobiography* emerging as paradigmatic of Stein's gossipy, popular writing and *Stanzas* representing, just the opposite, an abstract, stubbornly self-enclosed meditation—the richly murky, poetic depth lurking below gossip's sparkling prose surface. Although the texts are undeniably linked (each refers to the other, as when *Stanzas* intones, "This is her autobiography one of two"),[10] Donald Sutherland introduces *Stanzas* into print in Yale's series of Stein's unpublished work by contrasting the austere achievement of "the 'Stanzas' at their purest" with that of *The Autobiogra-*

phy, written "partly for distraction," and "concrete to the point of gossip."[11] Ulla E. Dydo similarly professes that "the difference between books like the *Autobiography* and books like *Stanzas* is not a difference in subject matter or genre and not a difference in degree; it is a radical difference in kind. The two books do not even sound as if they were by the same author." "Why," she asks, "in the summer of 1932, did [Stein] suddenly go in two opposed directions at once?"[12] Bridgman had earlier posed just this question of the breezy best seller and the posthumously published, crabbed, meditative long poem, influentially concluding that *Stanzas* "was written concurrently with *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, as a Steinian apologia for consenting to produce a popular book."[13] "Having suppressed her scruples," he concludes, Stein, in "the compromised *Autobiography*," "set out to satisfy the public appetite for entertaining and understandable anecdotes."[14] Once again, we are asked to bear witness to a considerable display of sordid anecdotes, for which, now, *Stanzas* does penance: "This parallel autobiography redeemed the betrayal," Bridgman claims. "It rescued Gertrude Stein's integrity," proving she "had not sullied herself as an artist."[15] Stein's inviting gossip, it appears, compromises her demanding art.[16]

If we turn to the demands of *Stanzas*, however, we soon find its endlessly talky "I"—supposedly the voice of a "Steinian apologia" for the gossip of *The Autobiography*—imploring, "Let me think well of a great many / But not express two so"; enjoying "[t]hat no one had had corroboration"; and wondering, "May they be mentioned" (64, 97, 101). It would seem they may:

> I think very well of Susan but I do not know her name
> I think very well of Ellen but which is not the same
> I think very well of Paul I tell him not to do so
> I think very well of Francis Charles but do I do so
> I think very well of Thomas but I do not not do so
> I think very well of not very well of William (108)

"Now think," we are soon instructed, "how palpably it is known" (137). Once we begin to feel about for it, gossip in *Stanzas*—its tone, rhetoric, and pronominal dramatis personae—becomes eminently palpable:

> This is what I saw when they went with them. (138)
>
> Leave me to tell exactly well that which I tell.
> This is what is known. (155)

How I wish I were able to say what I think
In the meantime I may not doubt
Round about because I have found out (156)

Just when they should be thought of so forth.
What they say and what they do (184)

Now I wish to tell quite easily well
Just what all there is of which to tell (190)

I will mention it.
She has been very well known to like it. (221)

I think that if I feel we know
We cannot doubt that it is so (222)

Can we doubt that we are here in the presence of gossip? Of course, just what kind of gossip (what was seen "when they went with them," and "what," exactly, has been "found out" or "known"?) remains open to speculation; but it is precisely this speculation that motivates the discussion that follows, in which I also want to bear witness to a considerable, if mostly unconsidered, aesthetic display of sordid anecdotes—to the gossip Stein stages and obfuscates, narrates and dismantles, feels ashamed of and revels in, meditates on and becomes throughout her work.

In recognizing Stein's gossip in *Stanzas*, what do we recognize? Most immediately, the presence of gossip foregrounds its formative role in Stein's innovative poetics, a role obscured by the conflation of gossip and her accessible, narrative manner and, further, by an understandable but ultimately untenable distinction between the popular and the experimental, or what Dydo calls "books like the *Autobiography* and books like *Stanzas*."[17] As I will demonstrate, Stein's complex turn toward the specific discourse of gossip, crystallized in narrative form in *The Autobiography*, is just as persistently present in the various literary modes she adopted during the years leading up to it. Rather than the curious premiere of Stein's trying on the authorial persona of the gossip, *The Autobiography* instead represents part of an ongoing engagement with the overdetermined figure of the gossip, with the form of gossip, and with her and her work's own status as the stuff of gossip. *Stanzas* thus not only presents a poetic use and consideration of gossip that runs parallel to gossip's presence in *The Autobiography*'s prose narrative, but also continues a project we can see at work in the numerous conversation

pieces Stein wrote from 1914 through the 1920s, pieces repeatedly punctuated by the rhetorical markers of gossip—gestures such as "[t]hat's what he said," "I cannot believe about Julia," "[t]hey had a rich father-in-law to the husband," and "[i]f I told him would he like it."[18] What did he say? What cannot be believed? Who married well? If one told him what? In these pieces gossip is everywhere, but everywhere abstracted from its familiar, narrative functions, suggesting the significant, overlooked part played by gossip's style in Stein's more overtly experimental, nonnarrative work. This work in turn upends conventional takes on gossip by encouraging us to attend to gossip as a complex manner of speech more than a particular type of (usually denigrated) speaker or narrative subject matter. Stein, that is, turns to gossip as a *style* that can advance oblique assertions of self that thrive on transformative play with normalizing categories of identity and hierarchy rather than neatly rejecting, subscribing to, or reinforcing their limits.

Stein's gossip also foregrounds the ethical problem of objectification—the possibilities and risks of making the subject an object—as it plays out in her writing and her desire for literary achievement and fame. Unlike the broader categories of dialogue or conversation, gossip has lent itself less neatly to those interpretive approaches that *have* significantly engaged the "chitchat" in Stein's experimental texts—especially the key feminist readings of Stein's talk as intimate and equal exchange, what Harriet Scott Chessman identifies as a "poetics of dialogue" that "presents an alternative to the possibility of patriarchal authoritarianism implicit in monologue."[19] The alternative pleasures of gossip—and especially, as we will see, Stein's gossip—derive from nuanced hierarchies and subtle power plays (who's in and who's out of the know) as much as equality, ill will as much as intimacy, self-assertion as much as mutuality, dishy monologue as much as dialogue. (As the garrulous Adele, Stein's fictional stand-in in her novel *Q.E.D.*, declares, "I believe in the sacred rites of conversation even when it is a monologue."[20]) For Stein, I argue, gossip's gains are inseparable from the quite real ethical risks of a discourse that depends on the objectification of an absent other. Gossip affords Stein less a dialogic other to "patriarchal authoritarianism" than a queer means of occupying—and potentially disrupting—its exclusionary logics. Even as *Stanzas* is propelled by a current of abstract gossip about various Hes, Shes, and Theys, its "I" is figured forth and objectified "[i]n their and on their account"—a disembodied, gossipy narrative as steadily threatening as it is seductive (61). Courting a productive tension between gossip as potentially malicious objectification and gossip as a mode of plea-

surable nuance and subversive power, Stein both worries and delights in asking, over and over, what happens "[i]f I name names if I name names with them" (65).

I begin this chapter by elaborating, in the next two sections, these aesthetic and ethical dimensions of Stein's gossip. This discussion centers on *Ladies' Voices*, a short experimental text that illustrates and theorizes how Stein's love of gossip is part of, not anathema to, her innovative poetics. My reading of *Ladies' Voices* thus identifies the foundational concerns of, and provides a broader context for, Stein's gossip in *Stanzas*, to which I turn in the chapter's subsequent two sections. Tracking the unacknowledged gossipy impulses of *Stanzas* in relation to its more frequently noted lyric ones, I show how Stein's meditation on gossip and its objectifying I/They relationship informs her apparently conflicting meditation on the I and You of lyric's seemingly animating address. Reading striking moments of address in *Stanzas*, I draw out Stein's exploration of the relation between the overhearing of gossip and the tradition of lyric as overheard utterance, and reestablish her meditation on the scene of address as a queer contribution to modern thinking about the lyric.

I conclude, in the chapter's final section, by situating this reading of gossip as it manifests itself formally in Stein's work within the context of modernist discussions of literary production. While her contemporaries often phobically disavow gossip as a feminine, middlebrow, and queer indulgence, Stein finds in it surprising aesthetic and relational possibilities. The contrast between Stein's inhabiting of the figure of the gossip and her male counterparts' anxious yet intimate relation to it at once clarifies modernist ideals of poetic making and literary ambition and suggests how gossip provides Stein with an authorial model and a style for her negotiation of those ideals, which would otherwise exclude her as a queer, female subject. Ultimately, I argue, Stein's shameless self-fashioning as a gossip in even her most difficult texts—and perhaps especially in those texts—both interrogates modernist artistic authority and makes a queer bid for it.

Listening for Gossip

What does gossip *sound* like? Although it is never made explicit, I imagine Stein herself posing this question, listening to gossip as a formal model that animates her work as it emerges from and produces the vexed intersection of literature, fame, and queerness. To understand gossip's role in *Stanzas in Meditation*, it is necessary to consider first the answers to this inquiry that

Stein ventures in the many short, talk-filled pieces she wrote from 1914 through to the composition of *Stanzas* and *The Autobiography* in 1932. In this writing, usually understood as dramatic and characterized as dialogues or "conversation plays,"[21] Stein establishes both the central terms of her sustained reflection on gossip and the formal and ethical problems that motivate what I see, in *Stanzas*, as her most extensive meditation both in and on the subject. Here I take *Ladies' Voices*, written in 1916 and first published in 1922 in *Geography and Plays*, as exemplary of Stein's early efforts to theorize and aesthetically enact gossip. The first line of *Ladies' Voices*, "Ladies' voices give pleasure," announces three nearly unavoidable terms for any consideration of gossip's relationship to modern literary language.[22] As the roughly fifty-line text proceeds, over four quick acts, to play with conceptions of ladies, voices, and pleasure as they appear within the scene of gossip, it soon asks, "What are ladies voices"—a multivalent question we might understand as asking after the sound of gossip (307).

Although, as I hope to show, Stein's gossip displays a specific rhetorical repertoire and tonal interest, responses to queries regarding the sound of gossip generally have involved a subtle shift in attention—away from particular qualities of gossip's speech and toward a concern with who is doing the speaking. Thus, when we put the question of what gossip sounds like to the canons of Western literature, philosophy, anthropology, or religion, we are likely to hear, say, that gossip sounds like a woman. And if we ask, in turn, what this figure sounds like ("What are ladies voices"), the tautological reply will often be, a gossip. It is as if, in compensation for gossip's distinctly sourceless, autonomous speech—winged words that, though they move in and out of those who perform them, seem to do so of their own accord—Western culture has generated a crude typology of the gossip, pinning down, in lieu of gossip's elusive voice, bodies that are gendered (whether women's talk or masculine shoptalk or scuttlebutt), classed (from servants' tittle-tattle to society chatter), and sexualized (as in old wives' tales, the homosexual's camp dish, or the nosy spinster's gab).

Yet if we attempt to trace gossip's image repertoire to its origins, we soon discover, alongside such easily identifiable embodiments of gossip, another figure for the gossip—this one of indeterminate gender and sexuality, a figure that, indeed, though voicing gossip, is less a person than a thing. We find this figure in Ovid's seminal description of Fame (the Greek Pheme or Ossa, Roman Fama), classical goddess of gossip and rumor, spirit of fame and infamy, renown and scandal.[23] There is much to be said about Ovid's brief,

astonishing account of the production of gossip and rumor as it relates to reputation: for my immediate purposes, however, what is most striking is his account's almost exclusive emphasis on Fame's house. When Ovid describes Fame's dwelling at "[t]he limits of the threefold universe,/Whence all things everywhere, however far,/Are scanned and watched, and every voice and word/Reaches its listening ears," he inventively locates gossip's agency not in the goddess herself so much as in her "chosen home" and "its . . . ears."[24] This home, "[c]onstructed with a thousand apertures/And countless entrances and never a door," is

> open night and day and built throughout
> Of echoing bronze; it all reverberates,
> Repeating voices, doubling what it hears.
> Inside no peace, no silence anywhere,
> And yet no noise, but muted murmurings
> Like waves one hears of some far-distant sea[25]

Just as it seems to be the House of Fame itself that, eager for good gossip, "scan[s] and watche[s] . . . every voice and word," it is this endlessly listening architecture and its "echoing bronze" that both records and spreads gossip as it "reverberates,/Repeating voices, doubling what it hears." Ovid portrays the gossip not primarily as the feminine figure of Fame, nor as a specific identity among the indistinct, gossiping "[c]rowds" that "throng" the house's "halls, a lightweight populace/That comes and goes" much like the anthropomorphized "rumours everywhere" that themselves "roam to and fro."[26] Instead, he imagines the gossip as a space in which gossip can be collected and staged, a seemingly totalizing archive of "all things everywhere." This archival space, built of "echoing bronze," anticipates modern recording devices, and its gossip appropriately becomes not simply something like a lady's voice but rather the static hiss and whirr of such a device as it records gossip, emitting "no silence anywhere,/And yet no noise," just the disembodied "murmurings" of ambient "waves."

What *does* gossip sound like? Could we say that the voice of gossip sounds like a tape recorder's wavering and stiffening magnetic tone, the technological trace of a seemingly passive medium asserting itself? Reading Stein's talk-inflected work of the late teens and early twenties, Bridgman suggests, "is rather like listening to an interminable tape recording made secretly in a household. Amid domestic details, local gossip, references to failed ambition, to sewing, to writing, recriminations, apologies, and expres-

sions of remorse come passages of intimate eroticism, sometimes quite overt in meaning."[27] One could argue that the technology of modern culture is here feminized and disavowed, with Bridgman figuring Stein as tape recorder in order implicitly to discredit her authorship by drawing on characterizations of gossip as mindless, female chatter and the gossip as mere medium for idle talk: a mass-produced gadget that can only passively record, never actively create. There is an undeniable force to the claim that modernism often defined itself, and has been defined, in anxious opposition to mass culture and its feminized technologies, including those of gossip.[28] But what interests me in Bridgman's playful and avowedly positive characterization of Stein's gossipy writing is something he surely did not have in mind—how, like Fame ceding agency to her "chosen home" and its recording technology, such that *she* becomes *it*, Stein's authorial agency here both shifts to and derives from "a household" that contains and is conflated with a tape recorder.[29]

The gossip as tape recorder may seem an unlikely—not least because anachronistic—authorial figure for Stein. Yet consider the following two segments, retrieved from what Bridgman might call gossip's "interminable tape recording":

> Hideous women. Why do they look like that? You like girls don, don't you? . . . Boring. Oh thanks. Blah, blah, blah, I asked him if he was completely hetero-heterosexual.
>
> Oh, what did he say?
>
> He said he doesn't speak about those things. Isn't he smart? Now that's a gentleman.
>
> Mm.
>
> You would be a credit to my name.[30]

> Did you say they were different. I said it made no difference.
>
> Where does it. Yes.
>
> Mr. Richard Sutherland. This is a name I know.
>
> Yes.
>
> The Hotel Victoria.
>
> Many words spoken to me have seemed English. (307)

The first passage, from Andy Warhol's *a, a novel*—his 1968 book composed of unedited transcriptions of audiotape recordings made in and around the Warhol Factory—actualizes the idea of recording everyday talk, mostly gossip, that Stein experimented with during the period Bridgman describes,

here exemplified, in the second passage, by part of the final scene of *Ladies' Voices*. If Warhol's art, films, writing, or celebrity would be unimaginable without the precedent of Stein, the bewildering implications of Stein's life and work, in turn, would be less resonant without Warhol's canny literalizing of so much of her opaque insight. In this case, Warhol's tape recorder brings into relief Stein's own queer mix of listening technology, domesticity, and gossip. In *THE Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, we learn that Warhol "didn't get married until 1964 when I got my first tape recorder. My wife. My tape recorder and I have been married for ten years now. When I say 'we,' I mean my tape recorder and me. A lot of people don't understand that."[31] Within this queer—or not "completely hetero-heterosexual"—domestic arrangement, Warhol claims,

> nothing was ever a problem again, because a problem just meant a good tape, and when a problem transforms itself into a good tape it's not a problem any more. An interesting problem was an interesting tape. Everybody knew that and performed for the tape. You couldn't tell which problems were real and which problems were exaggerated for the tape. Better yet, the people telling you the problems couldn't decide any more if they were really having the problems or if they were just performing.[32]

In Bridgman's remarks, it seems as if Stein's ceaseless attention, like that of a "tape recording," both captures and produces her work's notable "passages" of "quite overt" queer "eroticism" as they emerge from the background noise of "domestic details" and "local gossip," indeed, as if "[l]adies' voices" give way to "pleasure." Warhol similarly presents the tape recorder's (here parodically feminine) listening technology as an authorial model ("when I say 'we,' I mean my tape recorder and me") that "a lot of people don't understand," one whose supposed lack of authorial agency proves also a shrewd assertion of it. Warhol's tape machine—or Warhol as tape machine—not only passively records the everyday but, through attentively inattentive listening, incites the performance of it, such that "a problem transforms itself into a good tape."

Warhol's example helps us to see how Stein suggests a mode of creative listening anticipating and akin to his, when, for instance, in her early novel *Q.E.D.*, she describes Mabel's response to Adele and Helen's intimate, gossipy exchanges of their "views and theories of manners, people and things."[33] "Mabel," Stein writes, "would listen always with immense enjoyment as if it were a play and enacted for her benefit and queerly enough although the

disputants were much in earnest in their talk and in their oppositions, it was a play and enacted for her benefit."[34] As Mabel listens to "earnest . . . talk" "as if it were" the "play" that, "queerly enough," it is, Stein not so much emphasizes that there are no neat distinctions to be made between performance and reality—though that is one of the passage's queerer implications—as draws attention to the stylistic pleasures of transforming such distinctions. Mabel finds "immense enjoyment" in listening to something ostensibly "in earnest" "as if it were a play" and in imagining, in Adele and Helen's gossip, the pleasures of playing at something as if it were in earnest. In *The Autobiography*, Stein claims this style of listening to gossip and listening *as* gossip as her own when she has Matisse (who, we are told, "was a good gossip and so was [Stein] and at this time they delighted in telling tales to each other") observe, "Mademoiselle Gertrude, the world is a theatre for you, but there are theatres and theatres, and when you listen so carefully to me and so attentively and do not hear a word I say then I do say that you are very wicked."[35] Like Mabel approaching conversation as "a play . . . enacted for her benefit," Stein listens as if "the world is a theatre" for her, and this mischievous listening seems as definitive a part of what makes her "a good gossip" as "telling tales." As my digressive romp from the House of Fame, to Warhol's "tape recorder," to Stein's "interminable tape recording" suggests, gossip's theater has often been imagined as thriving on the drama of performative listening, the kind of creative listening that "reverberates, / Repeating voices, doubling what it hears."

In setting familiar conceptions of the gossip as an embodied talker next to a less immediate sense of the gossip as a type of listener—a "very wicked" figure, particularly attuned to what gossip sounds like and potentially able, even, to generate this sound—I do not mean to replace one with the other. It is in the juxtaposition of the two, I want to suggest, that we discover Stein's attraction to the figure of the gossip as it vacillates between a particular busybody and the disembodied voice of everybody: between a person and a thing, a tale and a tone, talking and listening. Listening, for Stein, is in fact a way of talking: perhaps even a better way of talking, she proposes, than talking itself. The "essence of being a genius," she boasts, "is to be able to talk and listen to listen while talking and talk while listening but and this is very important very important indeed talking has nothing to do with creation."[36] Stein's talk "has nothing to do with creation," but the listening with which it is bound up seems for her constitutive of both the gossip's and the writer's creative efforts to deploy what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls "the

precious, devalued arts of gossip" for "projects precisely of *nonce* taxonomy, of the making and unmaking and *re*making and redissolution of hundreds of old and new categorical imaginings concerning all the kinds it may take to make up a world."[37] Sedgwick's concept of nonce taxonomy recalls Stein's gossipy literary attempt, expressed with disarming hubris in "The Gradual Making of *The Making of Americans*," to "describe every kind of human being that ever was or is or would be living."[38] Stein positions listening as central to this effort: "I began to get enormously interested in hearing how everybody said the same thing over and over again with infinite variations . . . until finally if you listened with great intensity you could hear it rise and fall and tell all that that there was inside them, not so much by the actual words they said or the thoughts they had but the movement of their thoughts and words."[39] In terms resonant with the limitless ear for gossip ("every voice and word / Reaches its listening ears") by which the House of Fame determines reputation, Stein proclaims, "I always have listened to the way everybody has to tell what they have to say. In other words I always have listened in my way of listening until they have told me and told me until I really know it, that is know what they are."[40]

Stein positions gossip as a style of listening—what she calls "my way of listening"—when, in *The Autobiography*, she gossips with Matisse by listening with such complete absorption that it is also, paradoxically, a kind of studied distraction: like a tape machine, she "listen[s] so carefully . . . and so attentively" that she "do[es] not hear a word." Listening, for Stein, enables her mind to drift from hearing "the actual words . . . said" to the still more revealing "movement of . . . thoughts and words." This distinction—between hearing and listening, the semantic and the semiotic—occupied Stein throughout her career, most evidently in her lectures and essays of the 1930s. As succinctly expressed in the voice of Matisse, hearing suggests apprehending speech's intended, referential meaning, while listening entails taking in the *sound* of speech, if not necessarily its sense ("I don't hear a language, I hear tones of voice and rhythms," Stein declares in *The Autobiography*) (70).[41] Stein's listening thus becomes a way of generating and amplifying gossip, a means of turning even the banal exchange of polite conversation into the drama of gossip, as she absents and objectifies her interlocutors by gossiping about them with their "tones of voice." In this sense, her listening is a kind of *over*hearing, both in that she transforms conversation's direct communication into a gossipy moment of eavesdropping—listening in "with great intensity" as others' voices unwittingly "tell all that that there [is] in-

side them"—and in that she does so by finding more in what is said than is intended, perhaps even more than "the actual words" can support.

We find a similar distinction between hearing and listening in Roland Barthes's lectures on the concept of the Neutral—the desire for an ethics of style based on a "refusal of reduction," or a "parrying of generality by . . . nonparadigmatizable behavior."[42] Like Stein, Barthes engages the conventions of conversation and the "weariness" of their persistent and reductive "demand for a position" through a kind of listening that transforms talk into theater.[43] When "confronted with a conversation," he finds it "hard to float, to shift places": overhearing the "tireless" talk of a visitor, he laments, "*Ah, if he could speak a language unknown to me and which would be musical!*"[44] This desire engenders "a means for me to regain control, to retake a grip on myself: no longer to hear [conversation] but to listen to it: at another level, to receive it as a novelistic object, a linguistic spectacle."[45] In *The Autobiography*, Alice recalls of a country-house visit that "Gertrude Stein liked it, she could stay in her room or in the garden as much as she liked without hearing too much conversation" (145), and Stein, as we have seen, shares Barthes's desire to discover "*a language unknown to me and which would be musical!*" "Now listen," she writes in *The Geographical History of America*. "Conversation is only interesting if nobody hears."[46] Like Barthes, Stein attempts to listen to wearying conversation "at another level," one that exceeds hearing "the actual words." Such listening allows, as Barthes explains, the pleasures of talk without being "reduce[d]" by "the other's discourse (often well meaning, innocent) . . . to a case that fits an all-purpose explanation or classification in the most normal way."[47] Transforming talk's relatively fixed semantics into a shifting "linguistic spectacle" allows one the queer potential "to float" between and among the normalizing classifications that pervade everyday life and language, "to live in a space without tying oneself to a place."[48]

"What Are Ladies Voices"

If we focus our attention fully, now, on *Ladies' Voices*, we can see how Stein reenvisions the gossip as a figure that floats on the sound of dish, risking yet resisting the embodiments of both identity and theatrical performance. Like Ovid's vision of Fame merging with the House of Fame, Stein's short play unsettles the figure of the gossip as a recognizable identity—ladies whose voices give pleasure—as it imagines the voice of gossip as a space of subjectivity: a theater in which one might "live . . . without tying

oneself to a place." Before considering the voice of gossip, though, we must first establish that the talk represented in *Ladies' Voices* is, indeed, best viewed as gossip and not the more expansive categories of conversation, or dialogue, that have shaped critical understandings of it so far. Of course, as is often noted, what the voices in *Ladies' Voices* speak about, what the play's snippets of talk refer to, is not entirely clear. But *how* these voices speak suggests that although we can never be privy to it, their speech is specifically gossip.

Each of the play's four acts advances a scene—or the fragment of a scene—of gossip, most apparently when, in the first act, we find

> Ladies voices together and then she came in.
> Very well good night.
> Very well good night Mrs. Cardillac. (306)

This opening exchange appears emblematic of gossip—the kind of intimate talk ("[l]adies voices together") that thrives on the exclusion of others and would be cut short by another's presence ("and then she came in"). So, too, does the talk in "ACT III.," in which what seem to be two voices discuss the absent "Genevieve," who "does not know" that she is the object of gossipy speculation. This gossip sounds sexual:

> Yes Genevieve does not know it. What. That we are seeing Caesar.
> Caesar kisses.
> Kisses today.
> Caesar kisses every day. (307)

Even if we set aside the erotic connotations of the term "Caesar" in Stein's body of work,[49] her punning, here, presents an intimate "we" whose intimacy derives from its gossipy surveillance of the absent Genevieve—a playfully imperial "seeing" that *sees her* "kisses," not only "today" but "every day," and in this sense repeatedly *seizes her* kisses as the object of gossip.[50] Finally, one senses society gossip—this is notably a play about *ladies*—in the voices of the play's conclusion, in "SCENE II." of "ACT IV.," as they wonder about an unnamed "they" ("Did you say they were different. I said it made no difference.") and a "Mr. Richard Sutherland" ("[t]his is a name I know") who is associated with "The Hotel Victoria," and we hear them "telling of balls," "masked balls" (307).

Recognizing the talk in *Ladies' Voices* as predominantly gossip makes it difficult to follow those readers who maintain that the "linguistic code among

these female speakers is not based on polarity, hierarchy, or (sexual) difference," and thus claim that "instead of polarity and dichotomy it is mutuality that determines the aesthetic principle of the conversation between the female speakers of *Ladies' Voices*."[51] On the contrary, hierarchy appears wherever we turn in *Ladies' Voices*, from the obvious hierarchies of the scene of gossip—the "voices together" that depend on excluded, absent others—to the fine-grained attention to social status that so often motivates gossip, here apparent in the distinctions between married ("Mrs. Cardillac") and unmarried ("Miss Williams") women; between those whose names demand a prefix and those who, because of intimacy or class difference, demand none ("Genevieve"); between different ages ("[h]onest to God Miss Williams I don't mean to say that I was older"); between (literal or figurative) nationalities ("there was not the slightest intention on the part of her countrymen to eat the fish that was not caught in their country"); and even between those who are or are not of the nobility ("I feel that there is no reason for passing an archduke"). Hierarchy is further present in the persistent emphasis on circles of knowledge, on who is and who is not in the know ("[d]oes that surprise you," "[y]ou know very well," "Genevieve does not know it," "[i]n this she was mistaken," "[t]his is a name I know"). Rather than an aesthetics of "mutuality," the rhetoric of *Ladies' Voices* consistently implies "dichotomy" and conflict, whether snapping off lines like "[y]ou know very well that . . . " or "[i]n this she was mistaken," or buzzing with the bad feeling of terse exchanges such as "Did you say they were different. I said it made no difference" (306-307). At times, the play's voices seem explicitly to erupt into argument:

> Honest to God Miss Williams I don't mean to say that I was older.
> But you were.
> Yes I was. I do not excuse myself. (306)

If Stein's play opens with "Ladies' voices" that "give pleasure," in its final line, "[p]oor Augustine," it closes with a single voice granting pity (307). In *Ladies' Voices*, pleasure intertwines with pity, each tied to the hierarchies that are a definitive part of gossip and the pleasures of objectifying someone else by making of her a thing of scorn, or sympathy, or more benign emotional speculation.

Despite, then, the critical tendency to read *Ladies' Voices* and Stein's "conversation plays," more generally, as texts in which ladies' voices come together, here the voices seem to pull increasingly apart. We begin, in both the

play's title and first line, with ladies clearly in possession of their voices ("[l]adies' voices"), but, almost immediately, that possession appears less secure, as we discover "[l]adies voices together" but no longer yoked by an apostrophe. Soon the play asks, "What are ladies voices," a question that now wonders not only about gendered speech but about gender (what are ladies?) and speech (what are voices?) themselves, and by the final scene the text can only refer, less than confidently, to "what are called voices" (307). Hence, even the play's tiniest change in punctuation emphasizes shifting hierarchy, perhaps not surprisingly, given Stein's discussion, in "Poetry and Grammar," of various punctuation marks as "purely servile," "powerful," or "imposing."[52] Of "the apostrophe for possession," she remarks that although "the possessive case apostrophe has a gentle tender insinuation that makes it very difficult to definitely decide to do without it," she "absolutely do[es] not like it all alone when it is outside the word when the word is a plural, no then positively and definitely no, I do not like it and in leaving it out I feel no regret, there it is unnecessary and not ornamental but inside a word and its s well perhaps, perhaps it does appeal by its weakness to your weakness."[53] For Stein, an "apostrophe for possession" is a form of gossip, marking a "gentle tender insinuation" about a specific, tenuous, hierarchical relationship—one that "appeal[s] by its weakness to your weakness." But "when the word is a plural," as in "[l]adies' voices," Stein claims vehemently not to like ("no then positively and definitely no") its more rigid (it is "not ornamental") and collective assertion of strength. In the terms of my discussion, at stake in the trajectory of *Ladies' Voices* from figures of gendered speech to "what are called voices" is the difference between gossip's assertion of hierarchy as a malicious, normative fixing in place—"[l]adies' voices" as a universal and static type—and gossip's "insinuation" as a more "tender" exercise of power and of nonnormative relations, one whose pleasures derive from its nuanced, small-scale play with, rather than broad reinforcement of, identity and hierarchy.

In describing the pleasures of gossip in *Ladies' Voices*—pleasures that, however intimate, depend on hierarchy as much as on mutuality, on gossip's sharp observation of difference and dizzying oscillations between subject and object positions, talking and being talked about—I have so far been proceeding as if Stein's play advances a fairly straightforward, mimetic presentation of voices engaged in gossip. But, as the play's "[l]adies' voices" increasingly disperse, the "gentle tender insinuation" of a register of voice apart from the play's mimesis becomes audible. Dydo describes *Ladies' Voices* as a

"play of overheard fragments spoken by women," and although she means that *Stein* overheard these voice fragments in Mallorca in 1916, her comment implicitly points, as well, toward the overhearing presence at work in the play's text.[54] For we do not directly overhear the play's fragments of speech but instead listen to a figure in the act of overhearing them—a figure that, in mediating our access to the play's scenes of gossip is, thus, a gossip. This figure of voice, in fact, is an effect of a technique characteristic of the dramatic experiments in Stein's "conversation plays": her incorporation of what sounds like side-text (character lists, act and scene numbers, stage directions) into the spoken text—or, indeed, vice versa, as we will see.

Consider the complete opening section of *Ladies' Voices*:

> Ladies' voices give pleasure.
> The acting two is easily lead. Leading is not in winter. Here the winter is sunny.
> Does that surprise you.
> Ladies voices together and then she came in.
> Very well good night.
> Very well good night Mrs. Cardillac.
> That's silver.
> You mean the sound.
> Yes the sound. (306)

The play's first line—"Ladies' voices give pleasure"—sounds more like description or stage direction than spoken text, especially if read in the imperative mood, implying a voice that commands, orchestrates, and comments on "what are called voices" throughout the piece. In the next lines, this stage-directing voice seems, at first, to continue. But if the assertion of an "acting two" still connotes stage directions, albeit abstract ones, the comments that follow, especially when employing the deictic "[h]ere," feel increasingly part of the play's mimesis. It is almost as if an "acting two," in response to the claim that they are "easily" led, retort, "Leading is not in winter. Here the winter is sunny." The second-person address in the next line, "Does that surprise you," puts the uncertain divide between side-text and spoken text directly before us. Who is this "you," and who asks about its possible "surprise"? Are both the questioning voice and the "you" its question is addressed to figures within the mimesis? Is the voice of the side-text, here, directly addressing, rather than directing or commenting on, the voices within the mimesis? Or is this a question from within the mimesis posed to the voice of the side-text, or even the reader/audience, surprised

now to find itself being resisted and addressed? Side-text in *Ladies' Voices* at times seems to distinguish itself more clearly from the play's mimetic voices, as when it indicates, "Ladies voices together and then she came in," or pauses to ask, "What are ladies voices"; it also, at times, seems to cede the stage to the play's mimetic voices entirely, as in those lines that feel like direct speech, such as "[h]onest to God Miss Williams I don't mean to say that I was older," or the third act's discussion of Genevieve. Most often, however, the side-text irretrievably blurs with dialogue, particularly at those moments of second-person address in which an interpellating "you" sweeps together diegesis, mimesis, and reader/audience as it oversteps formal boundaries.

For Martin Puchner, Stein's general technique of mixing narrative side-text or "diegetic fragments" with mimetic "fragments of dialogue" belongs to her anti-theatricalism—part of the way in which she "pits theatrical mimesis and diegesis against one another"—and so the relationship between the diegetic side-text and mimetic spoken text moves mostly in one direction, taking the form of "an intrusion of diegesis into the dialogue."[55] Yet, just as often in *Ladies' Voices*, the dialogue steps into the world of the diegesis, as each points toward and comments on the other. In the passage above, is "[t]hat's silver" stage-direction, or dialogue, or both? What about the reply, "You mean the sound," or the confirmation, "Yes the sound"? Again and again, the play's diegetic voice appears both outside of the mimesis and indistinguishable from it, both directing and, importantly, being directed by it, and we repeatedly hear traces of this exchange:

> You like the word.
> You know very well that they all call it their house. (306)

> You really mean it.
> I do. (306)

> What are ladies voices.
> Do you mean to believe me. (307)

> Did you say they were different. I said it made no difference. (307)

These instances suggest "an intrusion of diegesis into the dialogue" but also a possible intrusion of theatrical dialogue into the diegesis: an exchange between side-text and spoken text that becomes structural gossip as the play's form echoes the pleasurable, hierarchical play of its represented scenes

of gossip—one voice talking about and transforming another, only to find itself transformed and talked about in turn.[56]

An instructive inconsistency between the initial publication of *Ladies' Voices* in *Geography and Plays* and the revised text found in Dydo's *A Stein Reader* highlights the work's investment in the uncertain imbrication of formal levels. Dydo does not specifically indicate or account for this small revision from one printed version to the next, but in an introductory note to the anthology she explains that, in *Geography and Plays*, "the printed pieces so often do not correspond to the manuscript text and typescripts that we came to distrust this book." Dydo's distrust marks the difficulty Stein's work engenders: how to discriminate among the author's, the theater's, even the printer's agency? In this sense, the publication history of *Ladies' Voices* foregrounds the effects of the text itself, since Stein's plays especially, Dydo writes, "raise innumerable questions," as "ambiguities constantly appear in their formats. . . . How is a director to come to conclusions about lists of characters, characterization, spoken words, and stage directions that are all parts of a continuous text?"[57] That any answer to such questions must remain inconclusive seems very much the point, as illustrated by the discrepancy between the opening sections of the two published versions of *Ladies' Voices*. In *Geography and Plays*, Mrs. Cardillac appears on her own line, in parentheses, while in the text in *A Stein Reader* (as we have seen) she is spoken to in the line "Very well goodnight Mrs. Cardillac":

Geography and Plays:	*A Stein Reader:*
Very well good night.	Very well goodnight Mrs. Cardillac.
(Mrs. Cardillac.)	That's silver.
That's silver.	You mean the sound.
You mean the sound.	Yes the sound. (306)
Yes the sound.[58]	

Mrs. Cardillac thus drifts out of what seems to be side-text that suggests at least some of the opening scene's last three lines are to be spoken by her and into the spoken text, where possibly we do not hear from her at all in these lines and she is only spoken of. She drifts, in other words, from subject to object as she crosses the inexact line between the diegetic and mimetic.

In *Ladies' Voices*, it is through such stray crossings from one formal level to another that we become aware of the mediating presence of a figure of voice that, I have been implicitly arguing, is the voice of gossip. We might

usefully understand this voice as a metaleptic effect. Gérard Genette's description of metalepsis—a narrative moment that transgresses the "shifting but sacred frontier between two worlds, the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells"—helps to clarify the implications of Stein's textual staging of a porous boundary between diegesis and mimesis.[59] Genette explains metalepsis as "any intrusion" of the "narrator or narratee" into the narrative's world, "or the inverse," thus producing "an effect of strangeness."[60] "The most troubling thing about metalepsis," he writes, is its "unacceptable and insistent hypothesis . . . that the narrator and his narratees—you and I—perhaps belong to some narrative."[61] The strange voices that reverberate within the metaleptic space of *Ladies' Voices* recall those of the House of Fame, another "world in which one tells" that becomes "the world of which one tells"; and indeed the "insistent hypothesis" of metalepsis could serve as an apt (if somewhat paranoid) description of gossip: for gossip, too, suggests that tales can take on a life of their own, and it, too, is always threatening (or promising) to turn gossips into gossip as they inevitably find themselves embedded in the stories they pass on.

I like to think that Virgil Thomson understood the intrusive, diegetic voice of so much of Stein's drama as that of gossip when, in staging *Four Saints in Three Acts*, he introduced Commère and Compère, two characters not originally in Stein's opera, and assigned them, as Puchner explains, "precisely the diegetic parts—narrative, stage directions, commentary—of Stein's confusing text," such that the diegesis "acquires a voice, a face, and a figure."[62] Is this voice, face, and figure that of the gossip? Commère and Compère—French for "godmother" and "godfather"—suggest gossip's still significant etymological roots in the Old English *godsibb*, or godparent. Stein herself seems naughtily to invoke this etymological link between gossip and godmother in *The Autobiography* when Alice, in the midst of the book's famously gossipy passages about Ernest Hemingway, recounts that, following the birth of his child, Hemingway "wanted Gertrude Stein and myself to be godmothers" and then notes that "writer or painter god-parents are notoriously unreliable" (214). Just as her narrative indulges in its most notorious dish, Alice quite literally becomes a gossip. Whether the suggestion is Thomson's, or Stein's, or my own, though, as I entertain the idea that gossip sounds like a godmother, I, too, am guilty of attempting to pin down gossip's elusive voice in a specific, embodied type. Stein, in figuring the gossip not as a recognizable identity but instead the strange and shifting effect of her text's metalepses—those intrusive moments when subjects perhaps become ob-

jects and vice versa, when the world becomes a theater or the theater becomes a world—asks us to do just the opposite.

In *Ladies' Voices*, Stein particularly encourages us to attend to gossip as a manner of speech, rather than a particular speaker, through the presentation of a perceptible style of listening that, as Barthes believes, allows one "to float . . . in a space without tying oneself to a place." The figure of the gossip floats through the play's diegesis, listening, as Stein might put it, "with immense enjoyment as if it were a play and enacted for her benefit and queerly enough," it is "a play and enacted for her benefit." This metaleptic figure, in other words, listens to "[l]adies' voices" as if *Ladies' Voices*. *Ladies' Voices*, to be sure, also presents the gossip as a figure of voice describing, arranging, and shaping that which it gossips about—as a voice that picks up, transforms, and passes on the play's mimetic gossip about Genevieve or Mr. Richard Sutherland. But Stein's gossip is foremost a figure she might describe as talking while listening. Because we most distinctly perceive Stein's diegesis at the moment of metalepsis—at those moments when the mimesis suddenly seems aware it is being overheard—the gossip becomes a figure of voice largely, and oddly, made present through a discernible style of listening.

When the text declares, "Many words spoken to me have seemed English," we therefore recognize this statement, in part, as a self-reflexive comment on a mode of listening focused primarily on sound and not signification, a mode that can make the English language only *seem* to be in English (307). In her lecture "Plays," Stein recalls a formative experience for this mode of listening: seeing, at age sixteen, Sarah Bernhardt perform in San Francisco. "It was all so foreign," Stein remembers, "and her voice being so varied and it all being so french I could rest in it untroubled."[63] Johanna Frank adduces this memory as evidence for a Steinian "poetics of aurality," a poetics she finds at work in *Ladies' Voices*, where "the capacity of language to communicate signification is superseded by word-sounds as signifiers that have nothing to do with communication."[64] In fact, Frank insists, readings of Stein "break down as soon as one tries to impose signification on the word-sounds rather than hear them as just that, sounds."[65] I agree with Frank insofar as we both see Stein as invested in what happens when "signification" gives way to "word-sounds" or, in the terms of my discussion, in what happens when one stops hearing and starts listening. But for Stein—aware that words can never be "just . . . sounds," somehow wholly outside of signification—listening is not quite separable from hearing. Even in intro-

ducing her primal encounter with Bernhardt, Stein admits, "I knew a little french of course."[66] It is perhaps in the spirit of this "of course" that Barthes, in *Empire of Signs*, tellingly frames his desire "to know a foreign (alien) language and yet not to understand it: to perceive the difference in it without that difference ever being recuperated by the superficial sociality of discourse, communication or vulgarity," as "the dream."[67] That this "dream" is unattainable is clear, but it nonetheless has the potential to reveal new vistas in one's own language: "a landscape which our speech (the speech we own) could under no circumstances either discover or divine."[68]

We can in this sense also recognize the line "[m]any words spoken to me have seemed English" as expressing precisely the desire to "impose signification on word-sounds," to divine in an alien version of one's own language meanings one would not have otherwise heard. At its most basic, this is how Stein's wordplay often works: moving from hearing to listening and back again as she takes referential bits of interest to her and listens to their tones and rhythms as they insinuate new meanings that one hears, in turn, in the translation back into signifying speech. We have followed Stein's puns in the third act of *Ladies' Voices*, for instance, along just this trajectory, as "seeing" her becomes "Caesar," and we discover the imperial gaze, and the gossip, that would seize her. I emphasize the way Stein's abstract listening emerges out of *and unavoidably returns to* referential hearing because, although her experimental work is regularly understood to have little or even "nothing to do with communication," its investment in gossip suggests otherwise. This investment in personal detail of the lives of others is not incidental to her poetics. The Stein who writes of herself, in Alice's voice, "Lipschitz is an excellent gossip and Gertrude Stein adores the beginning and middle and end of a story and Lipschitz was able to supply several missing parts of several stories," or, more simply, "She always liked knowing a lot of people and being mixed up in a lot of stories," cannot be separated from the Stein who insists, "I don't hear a language, I hear tones of voice and rhythms" (203, 81). Nor can the identifiable fragments of gossip represented in *Ladies' Voices* be considered apart from the formal structure and voice that overhear, echo, resist, and refigure them. As Stein's writing perks its ears at the slightest sound of gossip and teases it out—sometimes where it would least seem to be—by listening to the further gossip of sound, the figure of the gossip emerges not as a fixed identity but a formal space from which one might speak, providing a vital, queer means of "being mixed up in a lot of stories" without being reducible to any one.

I have explored Stein's early formal experiments with gossip to show how they open especially onto one such story, that of the modern lyric. The presence of gossip in pieces like *Ladies' Voices* of course signals an abiding attraction to the sort of narratives that populate the pages of *The Autobiography*. But it also enables us to see how, in *Stanzas in Meditation*, Stein draws on the *style* of gossip and its figure of voice to foreground and complicate the idea of "overhearing" that was becoming increasingly important for normative understandings of the scene of the lyric, another theatrical space imagined to make subjects out of objects. It is to this story that I now turn.

A Little Bird Told Me

Teach me half the gladness
    That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness
    From my lips would flow,
The world should listen then—as I am listening now.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, "To a Sky-Lark"

I wish to remind everybody nobody hears me

Gertrude Stein, *Stanzas in Meditation*

By the summer of 1932, after years of having "always . . . listened to the way everybody has to tell what they have to say," Stein seemed increasingly to feel no one was in turn listening to her. In *The Autobiography* she admits, in the voice of Alice, that as the 1920s wore on "Gertrude Stein was . . . a little bitter, all her unpublished manuscripts, and no hope of publication or serious recognition" (197). "Let me listen to me and not to them," she decides in *Stanzas in Meditation* (91), a poem that often sounds—in its relentless worrying of the pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and articles that dominate its stark lexis—like listening defiantly turned in on itself:

Who should she would or would be he
Now think of the difference of not yet.
It was I could not know
That any day or either so that they were
Not more than if they could which they made be
It is like this (138)

It is, in fact, much like this throughout the 164 stanzas that range from as short as a single line to as long as several pages as they make up Stein's ambitious, often inscrutable, five-part meditative poem. Even within Stein's distinctively difficult oeuvre, *Stanzas* has proven notoriously obdurate. Lyn Hejinian cautions, "To indulge in exegesis of this particular work is always risky," and even Dydo, the poem's most devoted reader, warily wonders how one approaches "a large work whose importance we do not doubt even as it defies analysis, characterization, classification," concluding, "beyond useful comments on details, most attempts to speak about [it] have failed."[69]

One way that readers have gained purchase on Stein's intractable stanzas has been to view their resistance as that of lyric and its intensely subjective, private expression. This stance might seem an illustration of the lyricization of poetry, an effort to dress even an odd, sprawling poem in qualities ascribed to the modern lyric that would appear a questionable fit. Yet the awkwardness of such a fit is part of Stein's own concern in *Stanzas*. The question of the lyric's workings and relevance was in the air as she composed her poem: the pedagogical practices that, Virginia Jackson writes, helped "to forge a model of all poems as essentially lyric" and became "the normative model for the production and reception of most poetry" were percolating on the college and university campuses Stein would soon visit on her American lecture tour, even while from the pages of the *New Republic* Malcolm Cowley declaimed, in a piece entitled "The Last of the Lyric Poets," "There is at present no real doubt that lyric poetry is losing the vitality it once possessed."[70] I understand Stein as entering into this unsettled conversation about the lyric through *Stanzas*, a poem we should encounter as not simply an object of lyric readings but as itself an actor in the collective invention of the modern lyric.

Stein seems to have viewed *Stanzas* as a meditative lyric sequence, describing the poem in a letter as "200 Sonnets of Meditation,"[71] and before we even begin to read, her title's emphasis on meditation both recalls John Stuart Mill's influential account of the lyric as "the natural fruit of . . . meditation" (later identified by T. S. Eliot as "meditative verse," or "the voice of the poet talking to himself—or to nobody") and anticipates understandings of the Romantic lyric—in M. H. Abrams's well-known description of it—as a "meditation," poetry that boasts "lyric magnitude and a serious subject, feeling fully meditated."[72] *Stanzas* furthers this invocation of lyric tradition

when it announces, in its first line, "I caught a bird which made a ball" (57). Sutherland set the tone for later readings of the poem by glossing this line as "I captured a 'lyricity' that constituted a complete and self-contained entity."[73] Mary Loeffelhoz concurs, "*Stanzas in Meditation* foregrounds its claims on the lyric doubly in its title (songs and subjectivity)," and also "in its very first line," by "throwing out an initial lyric 'I,' coupled with the familiar lyric song-bird."[74] Neil Schmitz, too, hears "the singing bird of lyrical poetry" in this first line, and, nearly paraphrasing Mill's assertion that lyric "poetry is *over*heard," that it is "feeling, confessing itself to itself in moments of solitude," perceives in Stein's concluding stanza that "the door is open . . . and there she is, introspective, thinking for herself about herself. We are privy to that mental drama."[75]

For most readers, Stein's seeming inward turn to lyric in *Stanzas* sits uneasily next to her open embrace of gossip in *The Autobiography*: as we have seen, critics have regularly sought in *Stanzas* a lyric antidote to *The Autobiography*'s poison pen. As Schmitz also notes, though, *Stanzas* "at once ironises and transcends the conventional notion of lyricity," presenting "a poetry in which the high-flown meanings of bird and ball are immediately relocated."[76] The connotations of lyric bird and ball, I argue, are partly relocated by and within the unlikely realm of gossip, displacing familiar understandings of lyric subjectivity. Consider again the poem's first line, as well as that which follows it: "I caught a bird which made a ball / And they thought better of it" (57). Stein's "I" here juggles bird and ball, self-assertion and others' perceptions. But what is at stake in all this juggling? Is the "bird" that of lyric tradition or of gossip (*a little bird told me*)? Does "ball" refer to lyric's putatively self-enclosed world or to the open-ended ball of conversation, which the "I" and its circle try to keep up? Who are "they," whose better thinking suggests, among other things, their own gossip about the poem's "I" and its authorizing force, as well as their third-person status as the object of the poem's self-authorizing gossip?[77] Before entering any further into this poem in which Stein engages the lyric with a gossip's sensibility, we would do well to attend to the bird and ball that flit and bounce not only throughout these stanzas but also Stein's writing of this period more generally, provocatively alighting, for instance, in a 1929 notebook in which she anticipates the first line of *Stanzas* by entering a poem entitled "A Bird," and then following it with a poem entitled "A Ball."[78]

From one vantage, "A Bird" and "A Ball" each reflects, in simple diction

and syncopated rhythm, on Romantic ideals of lyric voice. "A Bird" begins by asking:

II
Was it a bird.

III
This that we heard.[79]

Stein's conclusion emphasizes the past tense in explaining that the poem's "she" "was right" to "answer" that "it was a bird,"

IX
Because it was a bird.

X
Which was not any longer.

XI
Heard.

XII
Which was a bird. Heard.[80]

This final line evokes and at first appears to refute the Romantic figure of birdsong as lyric, setting the flat declaration that it "was a bird. Heard" against Shelley's famous proclamation to the "Sky-Lark," "Bird thou never wert."[81] But Stein's "bird," like Shelley's, is present only as an "unseen" voice, one that spurs the poem's query, "Was it a bird"; and, as her ambiguous punctuation suggests, once "not any longer" heard, it is also "not any longer" a bird.[82] In this sense, Stein's bird is as much a "blithe Spirit" of disembodied lyric as Shelley's bird that "never wert."[83] Each becomes what is called in "To a Sky-Lark" an "unbodied joy," a lyric vocal presence dependent on bodily absence, as in Shelley's well-known representation of the poet as "a nightingale who sits in darkness, and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why."[84]

When *Stanzas* begins, "I caught a bird," it thus heralds a "captured . . . 'lyricity' " exemplary of Romantic lyric but at the same time in defiance of its unattainable ideal.[85] (Indeed, though Shelley's skylark and Keats's nightingale

remain "unseen,"[86] Stein's aviary contains a "nightingale" [100].) Stein's impossible catch lays bare a paradox already apparent in Shelley's figure for the lyric poet, which precisely describes an "unseen musician" supposedly present only in its incorporeal "melody." A similar, paradoxical assertion of self by effacement characterizes the poem's later "wish to remind everybody nobody hears me" (193). This "wish" occupies three significant registers. Most directly, Stein's "I" here echoes her desire for literary fame: wishing, because "nobody hears," that "everybody" would. Or, recalling my discussion of Stein's "way of listening" as a form of gossip, this "wish" envisions a scene of address transformed into a space of gossip as "everybody" listens but "nobody hears"—as in *The Geographical History of America*, when Stein instructs us to "listen" because "conversation is only interesting if nobody hears." Or, then again, from a certain angle this "wish" is a lyric one, drawing on Mill's claim that "eloquence is *heard*, poetry is *over*heard."[87] Mill elaborates, "All poetry is *of the nature of* soliloquy," such that, in performing lyric solitude, though "we know that other eyes are upon us . . . no trace of consciousness that any eyes are upon us must be visible in the work itself. The actor knows that there is an audience present; but if he act as though he knew it, he acts ill."[88] In "remind[ing] everybody nobody hears me," Stein underlines the critically neglected social setting of Mill's dictum and turns it inside out, as if to say to lyric's overhearing audience that though they know there is a poet present, they must not act as though they know it. Here again, Stein points up the paradox—and odd sociality—of nineteenth-century lyric's demand that the bird-poet reach its "auditors" through the pretense of "sing[ing] to cheer its own solitude." As Stein's "I" earlier admits, "I am interested not only in what I hear but as if / They would hear" (139).

I single out these three registers of "wish" in *Stanzas*—the desire for literary renown, for the voice of gossip, and for felicitous lyric performance—not to make one paramount but instead to propose that for Stein each motivates and modulates the others. Both lyric and gossip suggest variations on a model of authorial agency involving self-assertion through self-effacement—one that Stein represents and enacts in *Stanzas.* Although gossip's voice would seem anti-lyrical—an ostensibly frivolous, collaborative exchange worlds away from the solemn introspection of idealized lyric soliloquizing—she intuitively joins lyric and gossip. In "A Bird," for instance, Stein's lyric songbird also loosely suggests gossip in providing a topic and a tone but no certain origin for the poem's conversation, bringing to mind the common phrase

indicating the sourceless voice of gossip, *a little bird told me*, in which we see that gossip, like lyric, also leaves "men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician." In *Stanzas* we repeatedly encounter gossip's little bird—a "bird a little very little as little bird"—and its transforming repetitions (127). Like the House of Fame, Stein's bird of gossip keeps "[r]epeating voices, doubling what it hears": "I have thought that the bird makes the same noise differently," she says (70). It also garbles the message: "It is always not only not foolish / To think how birds spell and do not spell well," we are cautioned (164). Throughout, "the little birds are audacious," and their rare absence suggests a lack of gossip: "not to go into that is not in question / Not when no bird flutters" (186, 191).

Stein's "ball" also intimates both lyric and gossip. On the one hand, Stein's bird-made ball, as Sutherland notes, evokes "a complete and self-contained entity," an autonomous world animated by and within lyric. In the brief "A Ball," the absence of a misplaced toy ball ("She had put it . . . So that it was not there . . . Where they had put it") enables a repeated "call," suggestive of both a game of fetch with Stein's poodle, Basket, and the *fort/da* game of lyric apostrophe and its world-making force.[89] On the other hand, the opening line of *Stanzas* presents its bird-made ball as talk fueled by gossip, drawing on the sense of the ball of conversation that must be kept up. *Stanzas* often seems to employ "ball" in this sense, as when, after being told that "[o]nce in a while they stammer but stand still / In as well as exchange," we hear "[a] ball fall" (102). Elsewhere, the poem's voluble "I" finds it remarkable that "I often offer them the ball at all / This which they like when this I say" (172). In *Stanzas*, it is gossip as much as lyric that keeps the poem's ball going, allowing Stein to say with confidence, "I could go on with this" (160).

Stanzas continually changes the subject from lyric to gossip, gossip to lyric, in part because of the ongoing, transformative capacity of each to *change subjects*. In experiments with gossip like that of *Ladies' Voices*, Stein had explored gossip's ability to make subjects both into and out of objects, and the opening lines of *Stanzas* continue to pursue this formal capacity, now in relation to lyric subjectivity. "I caught a bird which made a ball / And they thought better of it": the sentence that traverses these lines charts the transformation of a lyric "I" into gossip's objectified "it." Stein's opening lines unquestionably engage the lyric, but, more to the point, they offer a précis of the subsequent 163 stanzas of her poem and its constitutive aesthetic and ethical oscillation between lyric and gossip, subject and object, person and nonperson.

Thee and They

What does it mean to turn an "I" into an "it"? How can an "it" become an "I"? And why would one be preferable to the other? In a discussion of personhood and personal pronouns, Barbara Johnson quotes the linguist Emile Benveniste's reworking of "the ordinary definition of the personal pronouns": "Person," he argues, "belongs only to *I/you* and is lacking in *he*."[90] "In other words," Johnson writes:

> the notion of "person" has something to do with presence at the scene of speech and seems to inhere in the notion of *address*. "I" and "you" are persons because they can either address or be addressed, while "he" can only be talked *about*. A person who neither addresses nor is addressed is functioning as a *thing* in the same way that being an *object* of discussion rather than a *subject* of discussion transforms everything into a thing.[91]

The "person who neither addresses nor is addressed" and so is "functioning as a *thing*" is, for Barthes, the victim of gossip. In *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* he avers:

> "He" is wicked: the nastiest word in the language: pronoun of the non-person, it annuls and mortifies its referent; it cannot be applied without uneasiness to someone one loves; saying "he" about someone, I always envision a kind of murder by language, whose entire scene, sometimes sumptuous, even ceremonial, is *gossip*.[92]

Gossip reappears in *A Lover's Discourse*, where, in a fragment entitled "Gossip," Barthes persists, "The third-person pronoun is a wicked pronoun: it is the pronoun of the non-person, it absents, it annuls."[93] Barthes objects to the kind of gossip that fits its subjects into predetermined categories, enacting "murder by language," and such gossip becomes particularly insidious when it threatens the particularity of (and desire for) the beloved, when it "takes possession of my other and restores that other to me in the bloodless form of a universal substitute."[94] In narrating the love triangle of *Q.E.D.*, Stein also suggests the lover's distaste for gossip's "possession of my other": "Throughout the whole of Mabel's talk of Helen," she writes, "there was an implication of ownership that Adele found singularly irritating."[95]

In *Stanzas*, Stein seems similarly to consider how those necessarily absent from gossip's scene of address become "possession[s]" when she writes:

> I wish now to think of possession.
> When ownership is due who says you and you. (219)

Yet, as we have seen in *Ladies' Voices*, possession can sometimes be "a gentle tender insinuation," and one can even wish to be objectified, possessed. As Oscar Wilde quips in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, "There is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about."[96] Indeed, however much Barthes wants to attack gossip, his lingering on its "sumptuous, even ceremonial" qualities suggests a concurrent investment in its stylistic and erotic potential. And though "person . . . is lacking in *he*," though "'he' can only be talked *about*," though *he* "absents, it annuls," in *Stanzas* Stein is nonetheless drawn to the "pronoun of the non-person":

> No one knows the use of him and her
> And might they be often just tried
> May they mean then fiercely (162)

What *is* the "use of him and her" and (especially in *Stanzas*) "they"? Can these pronouns and the gossip they imply "mean . . . fiercely"? Rather than a "bloodless form of . . . universal substitute," can gossip meet, as Sedgwick suggests it can, "one's descriptive requirements that the piercing bouquet of a given friend's particularity be done some justice"?[97]

The Autobiography intimates the pleasure Stein takes in seeing at least "the piercing bouquet" of *her own* "particularity . . . done some justice." She repeatedly describes—in the third person—the pleasures of encountering one's words on another's lips, in the third person: "The newspapers . . . always say, she says, that my writing is appalling but they always quote it and what is more, they quote it correctly, and those they say they admire they do not quote. This at some of her most bitter moments has been a consolation. My sentences do get under their skin, only they do not know that they do, she has often said" (70). Stein lingers on this pleasure, recounting "the first time that anybody had quoted her work to her and she naturally liked it" and later repeating, "as Gertrude Stein always says to comfort herself, they do quote me, that means that my words and my sentences get under their skins although they do not know it" (101, 244). The insistence of these passages makes clear that Stein's sentences get under her own skin as much as or more than anyone else's, and perhaps most "fiercely" when voiced by another. Here, in miniature, is the formal conceit of *The Autobiography*, in which Stein imagines her own story as best told in the voice of Toklas, and Toklas's story as best told by Stein. As Stein writes in *Stanzas*, "I have often thought that she meant what I said" (173).

Being quoted ("and what is more," quoted "correctly") is of course not the same as being gossiped about: but when "the newspapers" use their quotations as evidence that Stein's "writing is appalling," neither is it wholly different. Stein's explicit pleasure in being quoted in such contexts complicates readings of *Stanzas* that characterize the poem's pervasive "they" as a repressive force against which the poem's "I" chafes. It seems safe to say that *Stanzas* is the most "they"-heavy poem in the English language. Over the course of its 164 stanzas, "I" affirms itself 1,124 times; "you" is addressed 111 times; "we" is announced 63 times; "he" shows up 97 times; and "she" 167 times. By contrast, the poem contains a staggering 2,665 instances of "they"—over 1,000 more appearances than the above pronouns combined; more than "to," "of," "the," and "and" combined; more even than the lexeme "be." If we include the poem's additional 414 cases of "them," "their," and "theirs," roughly 60 percent of its 5,196 lines contain some appearance of "they," creating the effect of what Joan Retallack calls a "vast horizon of Theys," a "force that powerfully affects the mood of the poem."[98] This almost entirely unattributed pronominal "force" reads like an extensive gossip network (*they say, they say, they say*) in which the poem's "I," as Retallack writes, "can instantly be rendered other by the They."[99]

Bridgman's influential claim that "they," though certainly ambiguous, chiefly "represent the normal reading public to whom Gertrude Stein had to appeal in the *Autobiography*," the "verbal conservatives" who "thought better" of her experimental work, underlies the critical consensus that the "I" of *Stanzas* resists and redeems *The Autobiography*'s capitulation to "them."[100] But although "they" and their insistently referenced, gossipy "account" hover ominously over the poem's "I" (and sometimes "you"), that "I" both resists *and* courts appearing "[i]n their and on their account" (61). Just as Stein's anecdotes about being quoted by the papers point toward the disavowed pleasure "they" take in her and imply the satisfaction she takes in "them," her poem's "I" and "they" get under each other's skin and out from under their own. Schmitz notes of the poem's pronouns, "Switches in designation would seem to occur from phrase to phrase," and as evidence quotes: "A landscape is what when they that is I / See and look" (213).[101] Stein's "they," by no means a stable referent, keeps before us the question of who they are, including the possibility of a "they that is I." When Stein writes, in the poem's opening stanza, "In a kind of way they meant it best / That they should change in and on account," are we to take it that what is "meant . . . best" is the "change" imposed on those who appear "in and on" their "account"?

(57). Or do "they" themselves "change" "in and on" their own—or perhaps someone else's—"account"? Similarly, when Stein reflects, "Who can be thought perilous in their account./They have not known that they will be in thought," does "They" refer to those who "can be thought perilous in their account" or instead to the "they" who relay this account and who "have not known" that they will in turn become objects of "thought" (59)? Who "they" designates is never settled within Stein's poem, and even the seemingly opposed positions of "they" and "I," third and first person, keep collapsing into each other as gossip's objects become subjects and its subjects become objects. "Sometimes," Barthes writes of gossip, "the mockery of all this, 'he' gives way to 'I' . . ."[102]

For Stein, the mockery of the third person and its exclusion from the scene of address can produce first-person pleasures. If the "pronoun of the non-person" "mortifies its referent," this mortification has the potential to make Stein feel not less but more vital: it is in being the object of the newspapers' ridicule that Stein becomes exhilarated by her own voice. Stanza LV, Part V begins, "I have been thought to not respect myself," but nevertheless maintains, "They can collect me./They can recollect me" (226, 227). The stanza's concluding couplet suggests why Stein's "I" consents to being objectified by the poem's "they" and its ongoing "account," asserting a close relation among gossip, shame and infamy, and renown: "Shame shame fie for shame/Everybody knows her name" (227). Earlier, when Stein writes, "It is very well to know./More than to know/What they make us of," the reworked colloquialism evokes "their account" and suggests that the gossipy narrative of *what they make of us* is also "What they make us of" (84). At times this constitutive "account" seems to prey on and create weakness:

> She is here when she is not better
> When she is not better she is here
> In their and on their account (60–61)

Indeed sometimes Stein questions the voraciousness of "their account":

> For which they do attack not only what they need
> They must be always very ready to know.
> That they have heard not only all but little.
> In their account on their account may they
> Why need they be so adequately known as much (61)

And others' accounts can even seem to account for and limit one's agency:

> In which on no account might they have tried (154)

But, despite Stein's "I" pressuring the limits of this account ("Let me see let me go let me be not only determined" [103]) and insisting on the unreliability of its narrative and effects ("There is no counting on that account" [142]), despite the poem's constant awareness that "[t]hey have threatened us with crowing" and its hesitance as to whether "they will enjoin and endanger/ Damage or delight," *Stanzas* repeatedly presents the objects of others' accounts becoming subjects through these accounts—and gossips becoming gossip as they "commence in search not only of their account/ But also on their account as arranged in this way" (133, 128).

In *Stanzas*, Stein takes on gossip's objectification—its uneasy pleasures and uncertain powers—as a queer strategy for evading the limits imagined for lyric subjectivity, finding the potential for agency alongside debasement in becoming an object.[103] Through her gossip's circuit of communication and its disorienting subject/object shifts, Stein teaches us to listen anew to lyric—to listen, at least, in her "way of listening." For as gossip comes into contact with lyric in *Stanzas*, we recognize that lyric, too, presents a voice shuttling back and forth in the space between subject and object. Drawing on Mill's assessment of lyric as (in Northrop Frye's later phrasing) "preeminently the utterance that is overheard," Johnson remarks that "the poet is in the final analysis *a subject as an object* for the overhearer."[104] Stein's gossip accentuates this implicit feature of lyric subjectivity—the way lyric's first-person voice has been understood to depend on and necessarily disavow its becoming an overheard object, a voice in and on someone else's account—in order to construct an uncanny lyric "I" that is also an "it." As one proceeds through Stein's stanzas, they can seem much like (to recall another "I" that is also an "it") Ovid's description of the House of Fame: gossips and gossip drifting about, an indistinct sea of talkers and talk. Occasionally, though, out of the poem's "muted murmurings," pronounced moments of the sort of heightened musicality and calling assigned to the modern lyric—"lyric is famous," writes William Waters, "for calling upon things that do not hear"—sing out.[105] These scenes of lyric address, in which an "I" intimately apostrophizes and seeks to animate an absent or distant, beloved "you," are consistently interrupted—but perhaps also confirmed—by the appearance of "they."[106]

For example, Stanza IX of Part III begins:

> Tell me darling tell me true
> Am I all the world to you
> And the world of what does it consist
> May they be a chance to may they be desist
> This came to a difference in confusion
> Or do they measure this with resist with
> Not more which.
> Than a conclusion (117-118)

"Am I all the world to you"? As if in tacit response to this question, "they" arrive, and the poem's second-person address to "you"—and indeed, this "you" itself—fades away as the questions subsequently posed seem less immediately intended for a summoned interlocutor and more generally to imagine "you" and "I" as objects of *their* speculation ("do they measure this . . ."). Even more insistently, though, "they" are conjured as an object of the poem's own speculation, the tenor of questioning shifting from *tell me all about us* to something more like *tell me all about them*. The scene's initial "you" and "I" thus become "they" and "this" as its lyric address becomes gossip both for, and about, an overhearing "they." The explicit invocation of this "they" seems to sabotage lyric: the relatively regular, four-beat measure established in the first three, tetrameter lines is scattered by the entrance of "they" in the fourth line and their own evaluative "measure"; and, whereas, before "they" appear on the scene, it is sonically characterized by the affirmation ("true") of direct address ("you"), after "they" emerge such affirmation seems uncertain at best. Do "they" represent a "chance," or do they cry "desist"? Do they "resist," introduce "confusion," and bring this lyric interlude to an abrupt "conclusion," or, quite differently, does their presence allow for the scene's successful closure? Is the lyric "*I* all the world to *you*" (emphasis mine), or are "they" a proper part of what lyric's "world" "consist[s]"?

Stein approaches these questions again in a passage of similarly heightened lyricism, this one rising out of the midst of Stanza VII of Part V:

> Did I not tell you I would tell
> How well how well how very well
> I love you
> Now come to think about how it would do

To come to come and wish it
Wish it to be well to do and you
They will do well what will they well and tell
For which they will as they will tell well
What we do if we do what if we do
Now think how I have been happy to think again
That it is not only which they wish (179-180)

This moment of lyrical address in fact *looks forward to* a moment of lyrical address. It does not say "I love you," exactly, but rather asserts its intention to do so: "Did I not tell you I would tell," the "I" says. Stein's "I" has not come to "tell," so much as "come to think about how it would do" or, at an even further remove, "to think about how it would do . . . to come and wish it," as, indeed, is being done at the moment of speech. Stein presents a scene of meta-lyric address that reflects on and reimagines the necessary conditions of lyric address. When, at the line break following the passage's sixth line, "you" unexpectedly buckles and "They" take its place, *their* overt presence does not, as one might expect, foreclose the possibility of lyric utterance—it seems instead to guarantee that possibility. Where "I *would*," now "[t]hey *will*" (emphasis mine). "They" and what "they will tell well" about "[w]hat we do if we do what if we do" prove necessary for lyric's scene of address: as in the poem's emblematic "wish to remind everybody nobody hears me," Stein's "I" here advances a "wish" for lyric felicity that perhaps only "they" can grant. "I" and "you" must become the stuff of gossip, something "they will tell well," if the lyric subject is to become (per Johnson) "in the final analysis a subject as an object for the overhearer." In making the methods of this analysis transparent, Stein turns the scene of lyric address into a scene of gossip about its auditors—a breach of decorum insofar as the lyric "actor knows that there is an audience present; but if he act as though he knew it, he acts ill." Such bad acting, however, seems less to spoil lyric's effects—including the effect of lyric subjectivity—than to allow Stein to rethink their terms. If, for the subject of lyric as much as the object of gossip, "what we do," or even "if we do," can seem to depend entirely on what "they will tell," *Stanzas* pursues a way to embrace the stylistic pleasures of both lyric and gossip and yet be "not only which they wish"—a way to be made in, but not exclusively on, their account.

An earlier brief moment of lyrical address in *Stanzas* suggests the ethical stakes of such unlikely self-making. Stein writes:

> Can we call ours a whole.
> Out from the whole wide world I chose thee
> They may be as useful as necessity (69)[107]

"Can we call ours a whole"? ("Am I all the world to you"?) Once again, at the fringes of lyric's "whole wide world," populated by "we," "I," and "thee," lurks "They." Stein's "thee / They" line break underscores how easily "thee" might morph into "They" in *Stanzas*. Although in the rhyme of poetic convention "They" might not seem as much a "necessity" as a "chose[n] thee," within the revisionary reason of Stein's gossipy poem "They" could prove just "as useful." But "useful" for or as what? Not simply, I suggest, as overhearing auditors whose unacknowledged presence confirms the success of a self-enclosed lyric world, allowing "I" and "thee" to "call ours a whole." Stein's "They" prove useful rather as an acknowledged audience for the poem's scene of lyric address, one that enables the pleasures and agency of lyric without strictly reinforcing its norms; as eavesdropping gossips who both objectify *and* animate "I" and "thee" "[i]n their and on their account"; and as themselves the objects of lyric gossip, around which Stein's poem stages what Barthes might call its "entire scene, sometimes sumptuous, even ceremonial." As *Stanzas* elsewhere affirms, "they used / To use me and I use them for this" (161).

Such use of others, of course, has typically received bad press: "Using people," writes Johnson, "transforming others into a means for obtaining an end for oneself, is generally considered the very antithesis of ethical behavior." "Respect and distance," she continues, "are certainly better than violence and appropriation, but is ethics only a form of restraint?"[108] In *Stanzas*, Stein poses this question in terms of gossip, seeking the possibility of an ethics that does not rule out the potential violence—or stylistic pleasures—of idle talk's definitive exclusions and appropriations. "[B]y word of mouth," Stein asks, "[m]ay they please theirs fairly for me"? (143). It is important to acknowledge the uneven terms on which racialized, classed, gendered, or queered bodies might be able to embrace gossip's objectification, the ways that choosing to do so perhaps already presumes the privilege of being recognized as a subject. Stein's particular negotiation of gossip, even while pursuing queer possibilities, may rely on such privilege, making the question of gossip's ethics even more troubled. Can gossip's damaging pleasures be justly indulged? Can invasive appropriation engender another's agency? Can "they make this seem theirs" and yet "conclude that parts are partly mine" (113,

226)? When Stein wonders about the "They which is made in any violence," "[m]ay they be kind. / We are kind. / May they be kind," the question seems less one of desired respect, distance, or generosity than of possible affinity between subjects and objects, persons and nonpersons, gossipers and gossipees (68, 248).

Johnson emphasizes one common way such an affinity might ethically be established: "There seems to be an easy way to treat a thing as a person," she writes: "Address it."[109] Turning to the rhetorical figure of apostrophe "enables the poet to transform an 'I-it' relationship into an 'I-thou' relationship, thus making a relation between persons out of what was in fact a relation between a person and non-persons."[110] (In the vernacular of gossip, we might succinctly express this idea: *say it to my face*.) Stein, though, in Part III, Stanza XXI, considers and rejects the possibility of a relational transformation by apostrophe:

> I have thought while I was awakening
> That I might address them
> And then I thought not at all
> Not while I am feeling that I will give it to them
> For them
> Not at all only in collision not at all only in mistaken (132)

Later in the stanza, Stein's "I" more clearly posits this "thought" of "address[ing] them"—and thus restaging the poem's tense I/They relationship as one between an intimate, lyric I/You—as a possible means of circumventing gossip: "I thought this morning to keep them so they will not tell" (134). But the poem firmly sets aside the possible mutuality of an address to "them" in favor of what we might call being used—"giv[ing] it to them / For them" to "tell." Instead of speaking directly and specifically to "them," the "I" voices the stanza to no one in particular: "Now I ask any one to hear me" (133). As in Stein's "wish to remind everybody nobody hears me," the request, here, keeps "them" productively lurking at the edges of the scene of address, a tacit presence spoken to "not at all" yet keenly acknowledged, as we have seen, at those points of limit and possibility where lyric's seams begin to show: "only in collision," "only in mistaken."

Stein revisits this line of thought in Part IV, Stanza XX, by also flirting with the alternate possibility of being addressed by "them"—"Should however they be satisfied to address me," the stanza begins—and confronting *their* persistent rejection of this possibility:

There nicely known for which they take
That it is mine alone which may mean
I am surely which they may suggest
Not told alone but may as is alone (160)

Just as the "I" avoids addressing "them," "feeling that I will give it to them/For them," here "they" are imagined as "tak[ing]" it as they choose not "to address me." In preserving the poem's I/They relationship, what Stein's "I" self-consciously "give[s] to them" seems to be partly the lyric solitude, the overheard "melody of an unseen musician," that depends on this refused address: "it is mine alone which may mean." Yet although "it is mine alone which may mean," Stein's lyric bird requires the ball of gossipy talk to actualize this meaning: "I am surely which they may suggest/Not told alone but may as is alone." Alone, but "[n]ot told alone": in drawing together lyric solitude and gossipy sociality, Stein pursues affinities enabled less by the mutuality of dialogue or address than by distinct registers of speech and circles of talk. Stein's "I" gives up what "is mine alone," knowing in return, "I am surely which they may suggest." Throughout *Stanzas*, "They may be as useful as necessity" for the self engendered not by lyric or gossip only but rather by the staged "collision" of the two. "Now a little measure of me," Stein writes: "I am as well addressed as always told" (208).

"I Become a Gossip"

What did it mean for Stein to become gossip? What did it mean for her to become *a* gossip? Under the title "Preliminary Aside to the Reader; Regarding Gossip, and its Pitfalls," Wyndham Lewis set down, in the autumn of 1936, the opening lines of his proposed memoir. "I am about to gossip," he typed. "I am going to be exceedingly 'personal' about certain persons. But this is not at all because I wish to be. It is because of *you* that I descend to these picturesque details."[111] If, as we have seen, Stein's reimagining of a meditative lyric tradition and conventions of address provides one context for her persona of the gossip, the modernist rhetoric surrounding gossip and its role in literary reception provides a related, more direct context. In this regard, Lewis's brief draft preface—ultimately rejected as the project that would become *Blasting and Bombardiering* took shape—has much to tell us about masculinist modernism and its perceptions of the gossip, and helps to clarify the stakes of Stein's claiming of that persona.

Much of what the preface has to tell us, to be sure, is expected: Lewis

depicts gossip as the crass lingua franca to which the modern writer is pressured to "descend" in order to navigate the anti-intellectual mushiness and passivity of a feminized mass culture. "Ideas the Public does not relish," he complains. "If it is desirous of acquiring ideas, it prefers to come by them *without tears*. It finds it more agreeable to extract them, in small quantities, out of a mass of inorganic and drifting gossip."[112] The previous year's *Testimony against Gertrude Stein*—which collates a number of complaints about *The Autobiography* and its gossip—makes essentially the same case as Lewis does, underscoring the "pitfalls" of becoming, in one's work, a gossip. The witnesses assembled in *Transition* seek to "invalidate the claim of the Toklas-Stein memorial" by emphasizing the figure of the gossip's lack of agency and deluded sense of it: we are repeatedly told that, despite Stein's "egocentric deformations" and "clinical case of megalomania," she was not "in any way concerned with the shaping of the epoch she attempts to describe," that she "understood nothing of what went on around her."[113] They dwell on the gossip's trivial, middlebrow motivations and their threat to the modern artist's "humanly important enterprises": "The depraved morals of bourgeois society are now opposed by the strong loathing which is felt by a few rare beings who have posited the problem of man's destiny and dignity with a gravity that is very different from the attitude which approaches it under the form of certain politely esthetic games."[114] And, troubled that "Miss Stein expresses herself through the mouth of Miss Alice Toklas," that she "let herself be told by her 'secretary,' " they position and disparage the gossip as both feminine and queer—a troublingly "coarse" mimic of normative domestic and literary productivity, cooking up loose talk in her "literary kitchen" and letting that promiscuous prattle, in "the lowest literary prostitution," spill up and over the brim of "the family circle" of "two maiden ladies greedy for fame and publicity."[115]

If this phobic embodiment of the gossip is familiar enough, perhaps less so is the way Lewis self-reflexively allows himself to occupy the very role he resists—the way gossip paradoxically supplies the blueprint for his anxious effort to withstand its infectious influence. The contributors to *Testimony against Gertrude Stein* betray no such awareness of themselves as even potential gossips, even though their pamphlet—despite the juridical authority claimed in its title—was received as and consists mostly of its own gossip about Stein and Toklas, and immediately became one more cog in the Stein gossip machine.[116] Lewis, however, introduces his own forthcoming gossip by satirically positioning himself on the verge of becoming a gossip ("I am

about to gossip") and in so doing demonstrates his uneasy intimacy with the pleasures and "pitfalls" of the dish he ultimately claims to reject. He performs his own odd mix of a feminized lack of agency ("I become a gossip, in the present instance. . . . I have no choice in the matter") and bald egotism ("I am out to popularise Pound, to jack up Joyce's stocks, and to make my own alarming name a little less horrific"), and he affirms his own mass cultural compromises ("I will show what stuff I am made of, and make a hearty picaresque affair full of jolly incidents, of all this highbrow business").[117] More pointedly, he deploys gossip's rhetoric with a wink, worrying about the consequences "if I betray a suspicious indifference to the great unwritten law of *It isn't done*. . . . For (between ourselves) *I mean to do it*."[118]

And (between ourselves) he does: when Lewis identifies "the trouble" with becoming "a gossip" as "how to overstep that decorous limit without appearing a little disreputable," the satire of his preface—his reputable disowning of the gossip he so skillfully and disreputably enacts—provides one solution, suggesting that the gossip draws as much as transgresses the limits of literary decorum, that it is perhaps less a subversive figure at the far edge of modernism than (as we have seen in my introduction's discussion of Eliot, Pound, and others) a disavowed discourse quietly inscribed nearer the center of its artistic practice.[119] Indeed, for all his faux trepidation "regarding gossip, and its pitfalls," Lewis—hardly known for mincing words when it came to being "'personal' about certain persons"—had already made his debut as a gossip on the stage of the modernist memoir. When, in *The Autobiography*, Lewis appears, we are told, "Gertrude Stein rather liked him. She particularly liked him one day when he came and told all about his quarrel with Roger Fry. Roger Fry had come in not many days before and had already told all about it. They were exactly the same story only it was different, very different" (122-123).

Stein, I propose, tells us "exactly the same story" about becoming a gossip as does Lewis, Braques, Jolas, and Tzara—among the many other male modernists whose names this list might include—only it is "different, very different." She does not reject their narrative of the gossip but brazenly inhabits it and the indecorous pleasures of its disavowed persona. Her aesthetic of gossip, her self-fashioning as a gossip, is thus not so much a subversion of artistic authority—though it is that too—as a queer bid for it.[120] Consider the authorial give and take surrounding Pablo Picasso's 1909 painting *Homage à Gertrude*. Picasso, Alice tells us in *The Autobiography*, "made for [Stein] the tiniest of ceiling decorations on a tiny wooden panel and it

Divine Dish. Depiction of Fama (detail), classical goddess of gossip and rumor, from the frontispiece to Alexander Pope's *Temple of Fame: A Vision* (London: Bernard Lintott, 1715).

I Often Think How Celebrated I Am. Pablo Picasso, *Homage à Gertrude*, 1909. Picasso's homage evokes the iconography of Fama to playfully depict Stein as a gossipy goddess, tooting her own horn. ©1909 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

was an hommage à Gertrude with women and angels bringing fruits and trumpeting. For years she had this tacked to the ceiling over her bed" (89). Those few critics who have commented on this painting have identified the central presence of Picasso's panel, an angelic figure bearing a trumpet, as both a biblical herald and a stand-in for Stein.[121] The iconography of Picasso's painting, though—from the soaring figure's herald trumpet and posture to the buffeting clouds on which its words take flight—seems to me to reference Fama, classical deity of gossip and rumor. Picasso's homage depicts Stein as Fame, a goddess of gossip presiding over the divine dish of 27 rue de Fleurus and boasting the ability to make or break artistic reputation. But Stein's gossip, in his painting, seems to be about herself: the text of the scroll from which she heralds presents an "homage a Gertrude," as if, more than trumpeting the reputations of others, Stein is preoccupied primarily with tooting her own horn. Yet if Picasso's homage is also a dig, it is one Stein recognizes and affirms. In *The Autobiography* she reproduces as an illustration *Homage à Gertrude*, making the wily painting an emblem of the text it illustrates, in which Stein simultaneously gossips about others *and* presents gossip about herself through the voice of Toklas. Reclaiming the panel in *The Autobiography*, Stein in effect gossips about Picasso's visual gossip about her gossip.

Here we find the frisson of the sudden shifts and tensions between first- and third-person representations that are, as we have seen, central to the lyric gossip of *Stanzas*. We find, too, the concern with renown that often motivates and is the effect of such uncertain negotiations of authorial agency. Fame, Stein seems aware, depends on one's becoming a subject as an object and somehow maintaining that tenuous balance. Part III of *Stanzas* concludes:

> I often think how celebrated I am.
> It is difficult not to think how celebrated I am.
> And if I think how celebrated I am
> They know who know that I am new
> That is I knew I know how celebrated I am
> And after all it astonishes even me. (170)

These lines' terminal refrain—*I am*, *I am*, *I am*, *I am*—punctuates their boastful insistence on the self; but, we are told, Stein's "I" trumpets its own homage in order that "[t]hey know who know," as if the poem's irrepressible "think[ing]" about the self is actualized only by becoming the object of

others' "know[ing]," at which point "it astonishes even me." "Once now I will tell all which they tell lightly" (63), Stein's "I" declares in an earlier stanza, suggesting an account of oneself enabled by the gossipy account of others—or "exactly the same story only . . . different, very different." *Stanzas* continually emphasizes the necessity of this I/They relationship for its motivating interests, and in the passage above, when "[t]hey know who know" is clarified as "[t]hat is I knew I know," we see again the poem's "they that is I" and the role of third-person gossip in its fame-driven, aesthetic self-making.

In portraying herself in *The Autobiography* as a modern version of Fame, Stein thus extends a persona she had already tried on in what Lewis might call the "mass of inorganic and drifting gossip" that is *Stanzas*. As the poem's "I" tirelessly speculates about who will "be seen to come," it is hard not to think of Stein (thinking of herself) as Fame, holding court over Saturday nights at her Paris salon and the reputations of the many names there in circulation:

> We learned we met we saw we conquered most
> After all who makes any other small or tall
> They will wish that they must be seen to come. (62)

As with Fame, Stein's gossip "makes any other small or tall," bestows fame or relegates one to infamy or obscurity. John Malcolm Brinnin vividly imagines the scene at 27 rue de Fleurus as "something between a court and a shrine," where "jockeyings for position went on" while "in the background, over the noise of the teacups, one could hear the sound of rolling heads, the rumble of dead reputations being carted away."[122] The poem frequently depicts this difficult arbitration of others' reputations and the erotic pleasure of such gossip, signaled by Stein's characteristic punning on "come." As "[s]o much comes so many come," "[m]ight they be mostly not be called renown," Stein wonders, "[o]r may they be very likely or not at all / Not only known but well known" (110, 67, 96). Of course, if "so many come" to Stein seeking "renown," it is in turn partly the fame attached to these names by which Stein's "I" will become known: as in Picasso's rendering of Stein as Fame, as in the claims of the "testimony" against Stein's idle talk, as in Lewis's literary aside regarding the figure of the gossip, the voice of *Stanzas*, in making or breaking others, is primarily concerned with the making of oneself. "I have thought that I would not mind if they came / But I do," Stein's "I" admits. "I also thought that it made no difference if they came / But it does" (154, 155). In *Stanza*'s gossipy persona, perhaps specifically that of Fame, we

recognize both another instance of, and the interest behind, the poem's meditation on the mutually constitutive I/They relationships of lyric and gossip. For despite "mind[ing]" the potential threat of their expectation or demand that "[t]hey can be well enough known," throughout *Stanzas* they are a "welcome" and necessary presence for an "I" granting but "unknown to fame": "Please be not only welcome to our home" (209, 214).

This characteristic attitude of invitation complicates the interpretations of critics who read the poem's style as unwelcomingly impenetrable. Alison Rieke, for example, deftly describes how, throughout the poem's abstract stanzas, "Stein writes endlessly about it without mentioning it once" but concludes from this that the poem "has something to hide," employing a "language of repression."[123] Rieke's account of *Stanzas* forms part of what Kathryn R. Kent describes as a tradition of sympathetic readings that seek "to rescue Stein's texts from charges that they have no meaning and thus no aesthetic or cultural value" by arguing that she "turns to textual difficulty as a way to escape censorship . . . creat[ing] a private language that only she and perhaps Toklas may interpret, and thus protect[ing] the sanctity of their relationship in a closet of her own creation."[124] Hence, for Rieke, Stein's "sexuality" provides the necessary motive for her supposed "need to speak of herself in enigmas and silences," explaining why she "declines to speak about her subjects, withholding, in negations and tautologies, privileged and intimate content," and why, "when anxiety or uncomfortable feelings try to make their way to the surface of this private language and become public, she buries them"—"as writer and as censor"—"in vagueness."[125]

At first blush, Stein's stanzas indeed might seem to indicate such sexual repression or self-censorship: "How I wish I were able to say what I think," she exclaims in one instance of the poem's refrain of countless wishes for expression ("I wish to say," "[t]he thing I wish to tell," "[w]hat I wish to do to say," "[t]his which I wish to say is this," "what I wish to say is this," and on and on) (156, 159, 177, 213, 229, 246). Yet such wishes, I contend, are best understood as part of a rhetorical pattern of paralipses. Paralipsis, the self-contradictory technique by which one emphasizes what one ostensibly passes over, furnishes Stein's stanzas with a rich rhetorical repertoire of ways to say something by claiming not to being saying it. One need not mention the array of paralipses common to exchanges of dish (*but you won't hear it from me*, or *I really shouldn't say that . . .* , or *as for Gertrude Stein's gossip, we won't even go there!*) to establish the trope's familiar role in gossip's rhetoric. Stein employs this rhetoric throughout *Stanzas*: more than any other word

besides "they," the adverb "not," often used by Stein in variations of the paradigmatic paraliptic tag "not to mention," dominates the poem's lexis and plays a determining role in its syntax. The countless negations of this circular syntax, if not all strict instances of paralipsis, generally share in what Susan E. Phillips calls the trope's "capacity for simultaneous disclosure and concealment" and steadily generate the paraliptic effects of gossip.[126]

Considered as instances of gossipy paralipsis, the many wishes in *Stanzas* give voice to what they profess only to wish they could say (as in "I wish I could repeat as new just what they do"), or to what they wish they had not said (as in "I wish I had not mentioned which / It is that they could consider as their part"), or to what they wish they did not have to say (as in "[n]or do I wish to have to think about what they do not do") (135, 172, 185). Saying and wishing to say, in *Stanzas*, ultimately bend toward much the same thing:

> This which I wish to say once which I wish to say
> I wish to say it makes no difference if I say
> That this is this not this which I wish to say.
> But not not any more as clear clearly
> Which I wish to say is this. (229-230)

When Stein's "I" says, "I am trying to say something but I have not said it," it thus seems an expression of pleasure more than failure, the poem's paralipses suggesting not "something to hide" but something to say, not self-censorship but a sly style of self-expression (207). As in its mischievous foregrounding of lyric's overhearing auditors—"I wish to remind everybody nobody hears me"—*Stanzas* emphasizes the unspeakable but is still, as John Ashbery describes it, "a hymn to possibility."[127]

Michel Foucault famously reminds us, "There is not one but many silences," and in reframing the "enigmas and silences" of *Stanzas*, its "negations and tautologies," as less concealments or disclosures than pleasurable, gossipy play with the power-laden structures of concealment and disclosure, my point is emphatically not to deny the (absent) presence of Stein's sexuality in the poem nor to admit it but claim it bears little import for Stein's readers.[128] Rather, I want to suggest the sexiness of Stein's difficult style itself, considering it as something other than primarily an effort to maintain an inviolate space of privacy, something more than symptomatic of coded, withheld, protected, buried, or censored sexuality.[129] As Stein avows, "Literature—creative literature—unconnected with sex is inconceivable. But not literary sex, because sex is a part of something of which the other parts

are not sex at all."[130] If, straining to make visible the presumed sexual subject matter—the "literary sex"—that supposedly is left unsaid in *Stanzas*, we brush past the performance and palpable erotics of *how* the poem so expressively does not say it, we affirm a less imaginative view than Stein's of what counts as sex.[131] For Stein, sex in "creative literature" has little to do with explicit representation but is instead something, we might say, that one expresses without ever saying it: it is not simply mimetic but always "a part of something" else and "really," she explains, "a matter of tone."[132] The "matter of tone" in *Stanzas* is largely a matter of gossip. Sex in these stanzas is one interrelated part of the poem's complex gossip network and its affiliations, a network whose "other parts" include friendships, rivalries, poetry, and fame; but also pronouns, forms of address, and paralipses. Certainly, as Spacks writes, "sexual activities and emotions supply the most familiar staple of gossip," but "gossip, even when it avoids the sexual, bears about it a faint flavor of the erotic," generating, even in the absence of explicit sexual subject matter, an "atmosphere of erotic titillation."[133] In *Stanzas*, Stein's "piquant love of gossip" entails—more than any specific content—an erotics of style. Although the gossipy rhetoric of Stein's infamously abstract poem rarely announces its subjects, it should nonetheless be listened to as a series not of occlusions but of invitations, welcoming us to its queer lyric performance of gossip. In its final stanza, Stein's poem renews its open invitation into the space of both lyric meditation and gossip. "I call carelessly that the door is open/Which if they can refuse to open/No one can rush to close," Stein writes, having offered proleptic thanks, in the single-line penultimate stanza, to those who accept this invitation: "Thank you for hurrying through" (248).

This invitation into the "home" in *Stanzas* (which recalls Stein's open, weekly invitation to her Paris apartment) marks out a liminal space, both private and temporarily available to the public—an interior that "I" allows "They" to inhabit, like the gossip's interiority as it is opened up to other voices, or the lyric interiority coyly staged for its auditors.[134] These spaces are, like the House of Fame, transformative spaces of the subject-as-object—the gossip transmuting into disembodied gossip, the lyric subject disappearing into its "unbodied," overheard song—and in this sense, the poem's frequently architectural diction (its "home" [166, 209] or "house" [122, 149] and its "windows" [81] and "door" [112, 113, 127, 168, 249]) refers both to the social space of gossip and the formal space of poetry. *Stanza*, of course, is Italian for "room," and Stein links her stanzaic structure to the rooms of

both gossip and poetry when, in Part V, Stanza XXII, her poem asks, "What is a stanza" (197), and answers:

> But it is it is just like Italy
> And if it is just like Italy
> Then it is as if I am just like it
> That is make it be.
> There is no necessity to make it be if it is
> Or there is not any real making it do too (198)

Beyond the melding of gossip's and poetry's stanzas, notice, here, how the poem's "I" is conflated with its structure: "it is as if I am just like it," the "I" observes of the "stanza," and though it might appear at first as if "I . . . make it be," "it" in fact seems to work of its own accord, since "[t]here is no necessity to make it be if it is," and "there is not any real making it do." As Stein's stanzas themselves "make"—"[a] stanza can make wait be not only where they went"—their "I" begins to seem almost incidental to, or even the effect of, their "making" (200). Thus, Stein writes that "I wish to remain to remember that stanzas go on," and the declaration of "how celebrated *I am*" gradually becomes an insistence that "*this stanza* has been well-known" (112, 184, emphasis mine).

This is the story condensed, we recall, in the poem's first two lines, which begin with a specific "I" and end with an indefinite "it," and also in its last two—"[c]ertainly I come having come. / These stanzas are done"—which subtly shift agency from a singular person to a plural thing (249). It is the story of the poem's title, as well, which ambiguously announces its stanzas as objects *contained within* the extended meditation of a subject who can only be implied, and also as perhaps themselves a meditating subject—stanzas *in the act of* meditation. *If walls could talk*? Stein's rooms, imagined as speaking for her "I," figure a Fame-like voice of gossip that multiplies and preserves but can "go on" independently of any particular, embodied subjectivity. Stein's stanzas, in other words, become an expressive space through which one might (to recall Barthes) indefinitely "float . . . without tying oneself to a place." The pleasures of such a space—in which unmoored subjects might become objects and fleeting persons could turn into persistent things—are not always benign. Stein writes:

> Believe me it is not for pleasure that I do it
> Not only for pleasure for pleasure in it that I do it.

I feel the necessity to do it
Partly from need
Partly from pride
And partly from ambition.
And all of it which is why
I literally try not only not why
But why I try to do it and not to do it. (144)

Talker and listener, subject and object, person and thing, bird and ball: as Stein tries "literally . . . to do it and not to do it," she fashions a persona that both enables and is effected by the fraught pleasures of her poem's gossipy reimagining of the ideals of autonomous lyric subjectivity and the masculinist terms of modernist authority—terms that would otherwise exclude her as a queer, female subject. Stein, that is—for "pleasure," certainly, but also for "need," for "pride," and for "ambition"—becomes a gossip.

2 "Ain't You Heard?"

Langston Hughes's Queer Gossip

"So Now How Can I Tell You?"

> You really should not tell me you are going to give all my letters to Yale because I will now become self-conscious and no doubt verge toward the grandiloquent. Besides I was just about to tell you about a wonderful fight that took place in Togo's Pool Room in Monterey the other day in which various were cut from here to yonder and the lady who used to be the second wife of Noël's valet who came to New York with him that time succeeded in slicing several herself—but you know the Race would come out here and cut *me* if they knew I was relaying such news to posterity via the Yale Library. So now how can I tell you?
>
> Langston Hughes to Carl Van Vechten, October 30, 1941

When Carl Van Vechten announced to Langston Hughes that he had finalized the arrangements for establishing the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection of American Negro Arts and Letters at Yale University, a collection that would house Van Vechten's extensive papers, including, as he informed Hughes, "all your letters . . . *sealed* till after your death if they contain any personal matters about others," Hughes responded to his friend by delighting in the complex situation of address his correspondence would "now" inhabit.[1] How, Hughes wondered, to speak at once to intimates, like Van Vechten, and to the archive? Aware that his gossip to Van Vechten—in this instance about a "wonderful" bar fight involving, among others, "the second wife of Noël [Sullivan]'s valet"—would now circulate beyond its immediate audience, Hughes's letter playfully worries the distinction between gossip norms, which allow for and even encourage talk about the personal lives of others, and privacy norms, which define the borders within which such talk is permissible.[2] "You know," Hughes writes, "the Race would come

out here and cut *me* if they knew I was relaying such news to posterity via the Yale Library." The "right to gossip," the anthropologist Max Gluckman observes, is a "hallmark of membership," a way of asserting the intimacy and exclusions of community, with the effect that "it is bad manners—which is a moral judgment and hence a sanction—to tell unpleasant stories about your friends to strangers."[3] Hughes accordingly registers that his epistolary gossip might, in its new institutional context among strangers, offend "the Race" with its bad manners, and he further suggests it might also clash with the self-consciously "grandiloquent" tone and decorum that thoughts of "the Yale Library" inspire. Caught, as ever, between the competing roles of "poet laureate of his race" and "poet 'low-rate' of Harlem," and between the complicated strictures of "the Race" and those of Yale, Hughes confronts another version of the dilemma he identified in his landmark essay, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain."[4] It is no surprise, then, that navigating these conflicting contexts of address, which confuse the boundaries of (at least) community, privacy, class, race, time, and genre, frustrates for Hughes conventional forms of disclosure and preservation. In such circumstances how, indeed, can he tell us?

Whatever the question of how Langston Hughes might—or might not—disclose "news to posterity" *was*, it is now, three-quarters of a century after he humorously posed it in his letter to Van Vechten, a distinctly queer inquiry. Rumors that Hughes was gay circulated throughout his career, fed by the fact that he never married, had several openly gay friends and a knowledge of Harlem's queer culture, and enjoyed the company of handsome younger men.[5] On one occasion, Hughes confided to a friend an early same-sex sexual encounter, and in his writing itself, he explicitly treats homosexuality—not to mention the less explicit queer thematics that scholars have explored throughout his body of work—in the short stories "Blessed Assurance" and "Seven People Dancing," in his novel *Not without Laughter*, and in poems like "Cafe: 3 A.M."[6] "Around the streets of Harlem in the sixties," reports one of Hughes biographer Arnold Rampersad's unnamed sources, "everyone knew that Langston Hughes was gay. We just took it for granted, as a fact. He was gay, and there was no two ways about it."[7] Hughes, for his part, never addressed such gossip, cultivating instead an opacity that left even his closest friends with little knowledge of his sexual preferences, let alone activities. Two decades after Hughes's death, Rampersad writes, "although many people approached for information confirmed that he was thought to be gay, no one could recall any concrete evidence for his reputation."[8]

Since the publication of Faith Berry's and Rampersad's biographies of Hughes (in 1983 and 1986/1988, respectively) introduced the longstanding rumors of "Langston's presumed homosexuality" into the wider network of print, scholars have wrestled not only with the issue of his elusive sexuality but, more interestingly, the archival conditions that at once vex and make possible its expression and our readings of it.[9] Rampersad, confronted with a lack of "concrete evidence" for Hughes's possible homosexuality and guided by a "strict regard for the rules of evidence," drew "the tentative conclusion that Hughes probably had been asexual," a thesis loudly critiqued as closeting Hughes.[10] In his afterword to the 2002 reprinting of *The Life of Langston Hughes*, Rampersad rightly notes the contradictions of this charge, since, he writes, "virtually all of my critics have been dependent almost entirely on material I myself unearthed and presented in my biography. Virtually none of them, as far as I can tell, has taken the trouble to work in the Hughes papers at Yale or elsewhere."[11] Yet, as Shane Vogel usefully argues, "it is precisely the terms of the archive itself—how it is defined, read, and lived—that is at issue in Rampersad's rendering and to which his critics object."[12] In this sense, I find the running joke of Hughes's letter to Van Vechten about "the Yale Library" prescient in centering on the tension between two kinds of archiving: that of the official archive, characterized by what Rampersad might call a "strict regard for the rules of evidence," and that of gossip, an ephemeral performance that, in its disregard for the rules of proper proof and comportment, proves queer. Over the course of the letter, as Hughes mischievously pursues the gossip that the imposing presence of the Yale archive would seem to discourage, these forms of archiving emerge as less at odds than in dynamic relation with each other, as when he abruptly concludes a paragraph that returns to and recounts the details of who cut who at "Togo's Pool Room" by declaring, "But the very thought of Yale prevents me from going further!"[13] Here Hughes—as we have seen with Stein's gossip—employs paralipsis, the gossipy rhetorical trope that draws attention to what it ostensibly passes over, as a way of telling without quite telling ("I was just about to tell you," "now how can I tell you"). Despite claiming that "the very thought of Yale prevents me from going further," it is clearly the thought of Yale's archive that fuels Hughes's coy gossip and provides its illicit charge.

In acknowledging the potential silences the archive engenders while exploiting the expressive capacity of such silences, Hughes's letter stakes out a relation to posterity less archival or anti-archival than counter-archival. When, in 1959, Van Vechten lamented to Hughes "how few Negroes . . .

make any attempt to assist the [James Weldon Johnson] collection," Hughes commiserated, "Of course, I understand how you feel about the JWJ Collection. I feel that way too. But," he continued, "in my long life, I have noticed no general excitement among large numbers of the colored race about ANY collection—from the Schomburg to the Metropolitan, JWJ to the Library of Congress, Cluny to the Cloisters. They are just not collection minded."[14] Hughes certainly was "collection minded." But he was also keenly aware of the ways institutional archives often fail or erase the histories of marginal lives and worlds, creating, for many who occupy these worlds, a suspicion or at least ambivalence toward the archive. While eagerly supplying the James Weldon Johnson collection with his papers and assisting Van Vechten in securing those of others, Hughes's gossip nonetheless indicates his own textual resistance to the logics of the collection, logics that would compel a normative ideology of racial uplift ("the Race would come out here and cut *me* if they knew I was relaying such news") and exclude or remain oblivious to queer experience (here the queer contours of disreputable nightlife implicit in the narrative and scene of the "wonderful fight that took place in Togo's Pool Room"). His style points toward a poetics of gossip that challenges the protocols and decorum of official archives and the social norms they represent, yet takes pleasure in the possibilities and dangers of "relaying . . . news to posterity." "Queer archives," writes Ann Cvetkovich, "stand at the crossroads of critique of the archive and passion for the radical potential of counterachives."[15] Hughes's jokey qualms about the presence of the Yale archive correspondingly evince not a refusal to tell but a queer effort to tell otherwise: not *whether* I can tell you, he wonders, but *how* can I tell you?

From this counter-archival perspective, it seems appropriate that, as Rampersad notes, "Hughes's reputation as a homosexual is based almost exclusively on rumor and suspicion."[16] That Hughes's queerness—in his life and work—might exist primarily in and as gossip is in keeping with the ephemerality of queer life and the unusual archival methods it demands. Hughes's poetics of gossip exemplifies José Esteban Muñoz's concept of "ephemera as evidence": "Instead of being clearly available as visible evidence," Muñoz explains, "queerness has instead existed as innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments, and performances that are meant to be interacted with by those within its epistemological sphere—while evaporating at the touch of those who would eliminate queer possibility."[17] In emphasizing, here and in the succeeding pages, the queerness of Hughes's gossip, my point consequently is not primarily to uncover any particular narratives that are passed on by or

about Hughes, nor necessarily to fix on specifically sexual content as "visible evidence" of Hughes's possible homosexuality, but instead to consider gossip itself as a queer style that inhabits rather than aims to resolve the uncertainties of history and sexuality, and in so doing brings into relief the limits and potential of archival spaces—ranging from the institutional collection to the modern lyric—for recognizing, engendering, and preserving nonnormative voices.[18]

Given its emphasis on gossip as a stylistic means of transmitting "news to posterity," a means presented as adept in maneuvering between communal expectation and individual expression, Hughes's letter to Van Vechten—however minor its ultimate status in his oeuvre—offers a sharp lens for understanding the style and stakes of the poetics of gossip that I analyze, in what follows, chiefly as it appears in the 1951 book-length poetic sequence *Montage of a Dream Deferred*. This analysis entails three central claims. First, I argue that Hughes's gossip in *Montage* functions as a counter-archival practice, one that approaches the modern lyric, usually understood at midcentury as ahistorical, in terms of an archival preservation more commonly linked, at the time Hughes wrote, with epic or narrative. "Traditionally," Hughes instead asserts, "poets are lyric historians," and "the songs of the poets have been not only songs, but often *records* of the most moving events, the deepest thoughts and most profound emotional currents of their times."[19] As a "lyric historian," Hughes deploys gossip in *Montage* as a queer poetics that seeks, even while baffling conventional notions of the archive, to negotiate and preserve the rhythms of nonnormative experience and feeling in postwar, everyday Harlem, including the ways that American black culture has, as Roderick Ferguson argues, "historically deviated from national ideals" and their supporting norms of heterosexuality and patriarchy.[20] We find this experience and feeling of being "eccentric to the normative"[21] expressed in Hughes's letter to Van Vechten as what Yale or "the Race" might deem unfit for posterity, or in *Montage* as the "conflicting changes, sudden nuances, sharp and impudent interjections, [and] broken rhythms" of "contemporary Harlem" and its deferred dream.[22]

Second, I argue that Hughes's poetics of gossip further allows him to construct and preserve, and us to perceive (if not render fully intelligible) his own poetic voice among his poem's archive of Harlem voices. *Montage* both begins and ends with an enticement to gossip—"Ain't you heard?" (27, 77)—and in the interim it stages a dishy repertoire of seemingly disconnected, colliding bits of suggestive talk and urban noise. The gossip and the

poet, I will demonstrate, emerge as the sonic residue of these collisions, suggesting a poetic voice neither reducible to nor wholly distinct from the poem's competing representations of black experience—a queer reverberation, or echo, that the poem records alongside what Hughes calls the poem's "music of a community in transition" (21). Indeed, despite his writing's reputation for accessibility, Hughes's authorial voice has been strangely difficult to locate amid the poem's dense soundscape. Hughes is well known as a poet of simplicity, but I contend that it is within the social and verbal *obscurity* of gossip, bebop jazz, and queerness that we register his own elusive presence in *Montage*. Listening closely to a series of neglected vernacular moments in the poem that are not simple or transparent but instead explicitly obscure, I show how Hughes highlights the shared opacity of bop idiom, lyric poetry, and gossip, each a kind of private language that stands askew to the wider world but promises alternative pleasures to its initiates.

Third, and concomitant with my first two points, I argue that the poem's gossipy authorial voice carries a critical queer resonance. Indeed, my discussion of Hughes's poetic gossip unreels less sequentially than this précis might imply; rather, my analysis forms its own montage, tacitly juxtaposing, throughout the chapter, the mutually constitutive lines of inquiry condensed in my title's reference to Hughes's "queer gossip," to which I will turn expressly in conclusion: the contentious historical gossip *about* Hughes's opaque sexuality, Hughes's representation of gossip in *Montage* as a potentially queer form of sociality, and Hughes's formal exploration of the queer art of gossip as means of preserving—without reducing—persons, and in this way an alternate model for poetic voice. Ultimately, the figure of Hughes's voice in *Montage*—located, like his sexuality, in an obscurity that cannot be wholly subsumed by the demands of intelligibility—resists reductive assumptions about the transparency of minority lives and writing, and resituates and asks us to revalue the modern lyric subject and its ideal of transparent universality.

Mapping Gossip: "Jitney"

Before *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, however, I want to look at a slightly earlier, seldom-discussed poem by Hughes that closely anticipates the role of gossip in that later text. "Jitney" first appeared in 1947 in *Circuit* magazine and later as part of Hughes's 1949 collection *One-Way Ticket*, where it formed part of a suite of six short poems entitled "South Side: Chicago (A Montage)."

As this subtitle suggests, "Jitney" usefully presents, in miniature, a number of the preoccupations Hughes would soon elaborate in *Montage.* Here I highlight four understandings of gossip incipient in "Jitney" that my reading of *Montage* will particularly expand upon: gossip as a formal analogue of montage; gossip as a black vernacular practice, staged within spaces of traditional significance for such practice in black communities; gossip as a form of sociality that includes among its possible functions the enabling of queerness; and gossip as bound up with the problem of poetic voice.

Like *Montage*, "Jitney" might be comprehended in part as the product of a lyric historian, recording the "emotional currents" of everyday experiences particular to black communities in midcentury America. The poem's title and opening lines name its setting as a jitney cab on Chicago's South Parkway. Chicago's jitneys—unregulated taxis that operated like buses on a set route; shuttled multiple passengers at once; and took their name from the slang term for a nickel, the original fare—were a staple of the South Side in the 1940s, compensating for white drivers who refused to service black neighborhoods and official taxi companies that refused to hire black drivers.[23] Hughes's poem portrays the talk that animates one jitney cab on two round-trips between 31st and 63rd Streets. It begins:

Corners
Of South Parkway:
Eeeoooooo!
Cab!
31st,
35th,
39th,
43rd,
Girl, ain't you heard?
No, Martha, I ain't heard.
I got a Chinese boy-friend
Down on 43rd.
47th,
51st,
55th,
63rd,
Martha's got a Japanese!
Child, ain't you heard?[24]

The phrase "ain't you heard" invites immediate comparison with Hughes's well-known use of it in *Montage*, where it bookends the poem; he employs it similarly here, as refrain and structuring device (it appears two more times, to parallel effect, in the poem's second stanza). But while in *Montage* "ain't you heard" might seem, at first blush, to refer only to the bebop jazz that Hughes presents as a figure for postwar Harlem ("Good morning, daddy! / Ain't you heard / The boogie-woogie rumble / Of a dream deferred?" [27]), in "Jitney" "ain't you heard" appears as an explicit marker of gossip—whether the gossip about Martha's "boy-friend / Down on 43rd" ("Child, ain't you heard?") or, later, about the news that

> I quit Alexander!
> Honey, ain't you heard?
> 47th,
> 50th Place,
> 63rd,
> Alexander's quit Lucy!
> Baby, ain't you heard? (217–218)

This use of the phrase "ain't you heard" to signal gossip suggests a comparable framing of Hughes's later urban montage poem, presented in his prefatory note as "like be-bop," as also like gossip (21). In fact, throughout his body of work, Hughes's use of "ain't you heard" is split evenly between designating gossip and indicating (at least primarily) song, intimating his alertness—as evidenced in "Jitney" and *Montage*—to the musical qualities of this vernacular form and an interest in the stylistic correspondences of gossip and music.[25] Thus "Jitney" offers a reminder that, although Hughes's readers have focused almost exclusively—and understandably—on the role of bebop in *Montage*, the poem simultaneously employs a variety of models (musical, cinematic, talk based) for its multivoiced form, each with its own significances. Recognizing the gossipy precedent of "Jitney" in *Montage* recommends an apprehension of how the poem turns to gossip as another kind of montage and mode of black performance, one that provides a model for Hughes's poem and poetic voice.

Approaching *Montage*'s form under the rubric of gossip illuminates neglected facets of the poem and of a modern poetics of gossip. One such facet is foregrounded in "Jitney," where Hughes depicts both the cab and the gossip that fills it as navigating the streets of South Side Chicago. This decidedly public setting of Hughes's representation of gossip—a setting he

develops further in the Harlem locales of *Montage*—distinguishes it from common notions of idle talk as taking place in private and from the scenes of gossip presented by the other poets in my study (with the possible exception of O'Hara, chattering away on the streets of Manhattan). Patricia Meyer Spacks observes of gossip that "the privacy of the dyad or small group involved in this kind of talk largely determines its special tone," but Hughes's gossip takes place not in the intimate, hushed tones of private, domestic space but the notably noisier, public realm of the streets (in "Jitney," gossip is passed on as exclamation: "Martha's got a Japanese!"; "Alexander's quit Lucy!").[26] This more public version of gossip is one linked specifically (though not exclusively) to black vernacular. It is, for example, in keeping with the anthropologist Roger Abrahams's assertion of "one crucial distinction to be made with regard to defining the Black speaking community," that "between house talk and street talk." Abrahams argues that in the vernacular practice of black communities, modes of verbal play like gossip are *not* regarded as private or based only in domestic spaces, but, rather, "it is on the streets that talking in a number of highly stylized ways becomes important in the prosecution of everyday activities."[27] Henry Louis Gates Jr. likewise notes that black "signifyin(g) rituals tend to occur outdoors, at the communal scene of oral instruction"; his example, drawn from the famous scene of gossip that opens Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, is the "porch, that crucial place of storytelling both in this text and in the black community."[28]

Hughes portrays the jitney cabs of black Chicago as an equally vital, semipublic space for practices like gossip and, further, imagines this space as a figure for the poem and the voices it archives. Noting how, "like the cab, the poem snakes along," Richard Barksdale writes, "not only does the form reflect the content in this poem; the form is the content."[29] To this I would add that we discern not only the route of the jitney cab as it moves along South Parkway—each stop a single line of the poem ("31st,/35th,/39th,/43rd"), each stanza one round-trip—but also the route of gossip, the unauthorized talk that the space of the unauthorized cab fosters and whose network we are able to trace as Martha gets off at 43rd and becomes the object of gossip (which transforms her "boy-friend" from "Chinese" to "Japanese"), or as Lucy's news that she "quit Alexander" becomes the gossipy revelation that "Alexander's quit Lucy!" Hughes's rhyming of street names ("43rd," "63rd") with his gossipy refrain ("ain't you heard") underscores this characterization of the space and route of the cab as space and route of gossip,

such that we might say that, like its gossip, the poem snakes along, taking the jitney's staging of black vernacular as a figure for its own in a manner that heralds Hughes's exploration of Harlem's public spaces of gossip—stoop, corner, curb, bar—as models for his poetic voice in *Montage*.

Attending to gossip's part in *Montage* also amplifies the queer dimensions of the poem's interplay of voices. In "Jitney" we can make out a comparatively subdued version of this queerness. If the nonnormative is the stuff of gossip, the gossip of "Jitney" is no exception, seizing on interracial relationships, erotic intrigue, and the talk, or "jive," about Chicago nightlife spots like "the Regal" and "*the Grand*" for its material (217). One might object that if this subject matter is queer it is only in a rather diffuse sense of the term. Yet a diffuse sense of queerness might be apposite, even inevitable, for a poem written in an era when sociological knowledge about urban black communities framed, for example, the economic conditions of their neighborhoods as signs of deviant gender and sexual forms, with the effect that, as Roderick Ferguson argues, "'sexuality' came to mean much more than eros, sexual instincts, and practices, but came to signify a host of apparently 'nonsexual' factors."[30] From this perspective, the loose, loud style of the jitney's gossip alone might be read, apart from its sexual content, as a queer failure—or refusal—of the normative behavior historically embodied by bourgeois whites. Consider the poem's rambunctious gossip next to the set of affirmations distributed by the Urban League's Chicago chapter to new migrants from the South following the First World War, affirmations ranging from "I AM AN AMERICAN CITIZEN" and "I DESIRE to help bring about a NEW ORDER OF LIVING in this community" to "I WILL REFRAIN from loud talking and objectionable deportment on street cars and in public places."[31] These insistent, detailed, and enduring imperatives toward community and national standards of comportment exemplify what Kobena Mercer describes as the "ideological view that black households constitute deviant, disorganized and even pathological familial forms that fail to socialize their members into societal norms."[32] In linking the defiant, public "loud talking" of the gossipers in "Jitney" to the transgressive sexual relationships of the poem's gossipees, Hughes draws on both this stereotypical view and the long-standing cultural association of "loose talk and loose sexual conduct" to accentuate gossip's disruptive queerness.[33]

But to what end? To be sure, even if gossip in "Jitney" might be called queer, the poem's more general attitude toward it (celebratory? critical?) proves ambiguous. Mary Hricko, in her brief comments on "Jitney," remarks

how the "lack of depth" in the poem's talk "as well as its superficial focus reflects the harried interaction of city life. Relationships are fleeting just as the time spent traveling in the jitney."[34] The poem, in this account, criticizes rather than celebrates gossip, viewing it as a frivolous symptom of urban alienation, a trivial mode of sociality whose permutations of personal material might more accurately be called distortions, the sort of "misinformation" that has long inspired "condemnations of gossip."[35] The revisions at work in these gossipy permutations—at once highlighting and effacing the ethnic identity of Martha's "Chinese boy-friend" ("Martha's got a Japanese!") and refusing an assertion of female agency (as Lucy's claim "I quit Alexander" is modified to insist "Alexander's quit Lucy!")—might even be seen as policing rather than challenging community norms by enforcing conservative notions of race, gender, and sexuality.

Yet however "superficial" its gossip's focus, the poem's persistent repetition of "ain't you heard" stresses the importance of being in the loop, evincing how gossip works like a form of currency in social exchanges.[36] Gossip in "Jitney" certainly accords with the insight of anthropologists like Ulf Hannerz in providing "the individual . . . a map of his social environment"—here, where Hughes plots the poem's gossip against the grid of South Chicago's streets, almost literally so.[37] Thus, news about the personal lives of individuals within one's community is positioned in the poem as, for better or worse, just as valuable as the more transactional information shared in the jitney, such as the cab's various stops, or who is playing at the Regal this week, or how to obtain "a good chicken" at the market (218). Perhaps even more valuable is the interaction this gossip enables, apart from its transmission of news. Gossip provides the jitney's passengers a form of entertainment, or pleasurable way of passing the time between daily errands;[38] beyond this recreational value it serves a function of community, establishing boundaries between insiders and outsiders along the lines of who's in the know.[39] Having "heard" the latest gossip, Hughes implies, is an important part of group affiliation and intimacy: note the familial endearments with which the jitney's passengers are invited to gossip—"Girl," "Child," "Honey," and "Baby." It is from this angle that Barksdale contends, "The time spent riding in a jitney becomes a peaceful interlude in the hectic struggle to survive in a swiftly paced urban society—an interlude to gossip or signify" that offers "refuge from the cold anonymity of urban life."[40]

Does Hughes intend gossip in "Jitney" to be read as a symptom of urban alienation or a relief from it? Does gossip nurture alternative forms of connec-

tion and intimacy, however fleeting, or police them? The poem enables conflicting readings of gossip's functions and worth, and it is precisely through this ambivalence that Hughes flirts with gossip's potential to record queer lives and to unsettle as much as reinforce set forms of daily life and their corresponding communal values. However uncertain the poem's stance toward it, gossip is the only space in the poem in which named individuals emerge. Martha, Alexander and Lucy, even the "The Duke" and "Hibbler"—Duke Ellington and his orchestra's singer, Al Hibbler, objects of celebrity gossip or "this week's jive" (217)—acquire names only when their transgressions or epitomizations of the community's ideals appear in gossip. Against the backdrop of everyday routines ("[n]ight school," church, grocery shopping) and the systems they represent (educational, religious, capitalist), gossip in "Jitney" serves as an alternate way for South Chicago's residents to navigate and present themselves to their community (217). Indeed, although the jitney and gossip are linked by Hughes, they also differ insofar as the poem positions its gossip as women's talk (it occurs between Martha and Lucy and their respective girlfriends), juxtaposed to the stern male voice of the jitney's driver, and in that the poem's gossip displays a tendency to go awry that stands out against the fixed route of the cab up and down South Parkway. The jitney's driver declares to a passenger wanting to "get over to State" that "*I don't turn, Madam*" (217), but the jitney's transformative gossip—which traffics in transgression and tells (to recall Stein) the same story, but differently—attempts an imaginative turning away from such straight lines, one that intimates if not enacts gossip's potential to be, as Spacks puts it, a "means of agency for women, those private citizens deprived of public function," and for the marginalized more generally a subversive "mode of power."[41] In this way the poem's gossip holds out the possibility, if not the promise, of a queerer version of the everyday. It is this queer possibility that Hughes pursues more doggedly in *Montage*.

He does so by using gossip to think through the problem of poetic voice, particularly (but not only) as that overdetermined term designates the formal figure for the illusion of a speaking presence (or the way that poetry, according to Allen Grossman, "reproduces the form and value of the person") and as it indicates social agency or power.[42] Each of the features I have highlighted in Hughes's treatment of gossip in "Jitney"—his recognition of its montage-like, polyphonic form; his staging of it within traditional spaces of black vernacular practice; his intimations, however hesitant, of its queer potential to recognize and preserve nonnormative experience and lives—

anticipates a dimension of voice that challenges the prevailing conceptions of voice at work in postwar lyric theory and that preoccupies him in *Montage*. In "Jitney" we see these burgeoning preoccupations.

"Jitney" comprises multiple, exuberant voices (nearly every utterance is an exclamation) within the space of the cab, with the notable exception of its tonally more neutral first two lines, "Corners / Of South Parkway," followed by a colon (217). Who speaks these lines? Since the rest of the poem is given over to the voices that fleetingly occupy the jitney's stage, its opening lines function as extradialogic stage directions that apparently belong to an authorial voice. Identifying the presence of this organizing perspective for the voices that follow seems, in fact, to be the primary purpose of these lines, since their other, more obvious purpose—to locate the poem's scene—becomes, given the intradialogic stage directions of the driver's calling out of stops, which ensure we know quite well where we are, almost immediately redundant.

Although we don't hear directly from this authorial voice after its initiating direction, it continues to be present formally in, for example, the poem's rhymes, which imply an artful arrangement rather than mere transcription of the jitney's voices. "Jitney," that is, doesn't so much neutrally present the passengers' gossip about Martha or Lucy as present its own gossipy spin on this gossip (one that highlights more than identifies with the contexts and misinformation of the jitney's talk). As with Stein in *Ladies' Voices*, in "Jitney" we are made aware of a mediating presence that, in passing on and framing for us the voices and gossip of others, might be heard as the voice of gossip. This voice recalls, too, the House of Fame in that it seems, in its presence for the duration of multiple round-trips, to belong less to another, eavesdropping passenger than to the jitney itself, imagined as a resonant, archival space of gossip, now located at the "Corners / Of South Parkway" instead of "the limits of the threefold universe." The hailing of the "Cab!" that begins and ends the poem—"Hey! / Cab!"—further gives the jitney, by virtue of being addressed, an almost animate quality, as if it could potentially respond (as in fact it in some ways does in the poem) (218). This hailing, abstracted from its pragmatic function when placed in the poetic context of "Jitney," feels akin to the apostrophic calling out to an unhearing entity that Jonathan Culler has influentially identified as "a device which the poetic voice uses to establish with an object a relationship which helps to constitute him."[43] Apostrophic invocation, Culler demonstrates, is a trope of poetic vocation, such that we can imagine Hughes's poem, if not quite spoken by the ani-

mated jitney itself, as spoken by a poet who has taken the jitney and its space of gossip as a strange means of claiming his own poetic voice (218). By making the jitney seem capable of speaking, Hughes obliquely asserts his own authorial agency and voice. The obscure presence of this voice in *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, to which I now turn my attention fully, allows us to better understand how and why he engages gossip to meditate on the issue of poetic voice and its capabilities to perform, disclose, and preserve queer lives and worlds.

Hughes's Voice

The sequence of ninety-one individual pieces that together form what Hughes described as a "book-length poem" hosts at least that many distinct speakers, ensuring that readers must both attend to and question the figure of voice in *Montage of a Dream Deferred*.[44] Such questions perhaps have been quieted for the many readers who encounter the poetry of *Montage* not as the "book-length poem" Hughes intended but instead as excerpted in anthologies, where its parts (most famously "Theme for English B" and "Harlem," with its initiating question, "What happens to a dream deferred?") appear as self-contained, individual poems, plucked out of the volume's chorus.[45] On the one hand, outside of the context of the longer work these anthologized pieces and their isolated speakers do become more amenable to lyric readings that occlude the effects and meanings of the poem's montage form; yet, on the other hand, this editorial problem of how to read and preserve the poem's individual *and* communal voices fittingly poses precisely the formal and social questions that concern Hughes in his multivoiced text. Accordingly, if the poem's "isolated vignettes of Harlem," as Rampersad asserts, "sought to catch in verse the variety of Harlem life," most scholars have emphasized that they do so through a representational and formal interest in the voices that seem to speak in these "vignettes."[46] Onwuchekwa Jemie, for example, finds in *Montage* "a community of voices . . . orchestrated" by Hughes, and Steven C. Tracy similarly describes the method of Hughes's montage as having to do with constructing and meditating on poetic voice: for him, the poem is an "assemblage of Harlem's variety of great vernacular voices, kind of 'A Typical Day in Harlem' to show how fruitful those voices could be."[47] Critics seem to agree that *Montage*, a poem characterized most often in relation to its Harlem setting and bebop sound, is a work equally concerned with voice, even as—or because—apparently straightforward questions about who speaks in the poem only give rise to further,

more uncertain queries. Upon meeting the intrusive, italicized voice of *Montage*'s opening piece, "Dream Boogie," for instance, Edward Brunner confronts "a new voice that arises from who knows where. It may be a voice internal to the speaker of the first lines," he writes, or "it may be the voice of an irreverent narrator."[48] It may also be, one might add, a second diegetic voice, in dialogue with the poem's first; one cannot be sure. Here, as throughout *Montage*, the poem's curiosity about the various (not always "fruitful") workings and effects, both social and formal, of its overlapping soundtrack of Harlem voices becomes the reader's own.

Lesley Wheeler sharply situates this curiosity about voice as part of a broader exploration by Hughes of "a range of problems that complicate the lyric," including "the question of how a poem can express or construct a self, how a mass of printed words can seem haunted by its absent author."[49] In this sense, Hughes's poem clarifies and draws on the overdetermined nature of the term "voice" as applied to written texts. Voice, as variously used by poets and critics, can, among other things, suggest written poetry's seeming basis in sound, designate the fictive speaking presence(s) represented in a given poem, serve as a metaphor for the effect of authorial personality and presence, and indicate political agency (as in finding or claiming one's voice). Among these uses, my primary attention is to how Hughes inhabits what Patricia Parker describes as a constitutive problem for twentieth-century poetry and poetics: "the vexed issue, in lyric, of subjectivity and speaking voice."[50] Of course, one might quarrel that the speaking voices in the book-length, polyvocal *Montage* hardly occupy a *lyric* poem and that the many readings of *Montage* as such merely illustrate the history of lyricization that, Virginia Jackson argues, has produced our increasingly capacious notion of the genre.[51] My readings of *Montage* underline how the putatively stable, unifying voice of midcentury lyric reading often reveals itself to be, as Scott Brewster writes, "an enigmatic, inconsistent figure or anchoring point in a poetic text," such that the term "lyric" might best designate "a self-conscious reflection on the relationship of poetry, subjectivity, and voice," one that "often produces uncertain or contradictory constructions of the self."[52] *Montage* is certainly "lyric" in this sense of the term; its lyric gossip engages in self-reflexive gossip *about*, rather than assuming in advance, the status and workings of lyric subjectivity and the figure of voice—indeed, about the very expectation, for contemporary readers, that voice will be heard.

Despite my focus on the problem of voice and subjectivity, I maintain the productive multiplicity of voice's meanings; rather than attempting to pin

down a more narrow sense of the figure, I acknowledge that its indeterminacy is "central to what voice is, or at least to how voice *works*."[53] Hence, even as I emphasize the way Hughes's poem experiments with voice as the fiction of presence, whether of the poet or a persona, questions about voice as sound and as political agency—and the ways these different senses of voice inflect and blur into each other—remain, as they are in *Montage*, close to hand. Who speaks in *Montage*? How many voices do we hear? To whom do they speak, and what are the relations among them? What rhetorical and poetic techniques effect their illusions of vocal presence? Why is such "presence" expected, and for whom is it possible, or granted? What are the social implications of vocal presence? What are the effects of the interactions between voice and sound (whether bebop vocalizing or urban noise) that pervade the poem? And—central to the following discussion—can we distinguish the poet's own voice within his poem's play of voices and sounds?

If it has been relatively easy to see how the many voices of Hughes's poem "sought to catch in verse the variety of Harlem life," his authorial voice among this variety has been more difficult to place. Wheeler identifies an "organizing perspective, which begins and ends the volume and comments at frequent intervals in between," but carefully notes, "It is impossible, however, to separate this recurring character from the others with absolute clarity."[54] Robert O'Brien Hokanson likewise explores "the multiplicity of speakers the poem presents and the stance and status of the poet's voice among them," identifying at certain moments "what might be considered the authorial or 'poetic' voice of the poem," yet concluding that "throughout the poem . . . the poet's voice is muted, and the poem's wider play of voices dominates the text."[55] Such formal questions about *Montage*'s indeterminate authorial voice and its place within the poem's community of Harlem voices resound with the biographical and archival questions about Hughes's sexuality with which I began: in each case, one asks where, and how, and even *why* do we locate Hughes, if at all? Where does Hughes locate himself? "Poetry," writes Allen Grossman, "is situated upon the central question of our civilization—how do we know when a *person* is present?—and suffers all of the strains which we feel when we contemplate the precariousness of our visibility to others."[56] For Hughes and other marginalized poets excluded from modern lyric ideals of transparent universality, both such precarity *and* the dangers of visibility are intensified, making Hughes's experiments with voice—or again, more accurately, with the expectation

that voice will be heard in a poem—a vital source of thinking about the lyric and the problems and possibilities of its effects of subjectivity.

While aspects of voice have been central in critical accounts of *Montage*, Hokanson and Wheeler are among the few critics to have addressed specifically Hughes's own "voice" in the poem. Yet, as I hope to demonstrate, Hughes makes it his business to draw our attention to this precarious, organizing voice, which (as in "Jitney") may be "muted" but quite loudly so. In foregrounding how this voice speaks, and where it is situated, *Montage*'s formal preoccupations are close to those designated by voice in the less abstract, narratological sense: the question of who narrates and from where. As Gérard Genette writes of narrative voice, if "the narrative is on two levels," then "the second—*where someone narrates*—is where most of the drama's excitement is."[57] While *Montage* is not a narrative poem, I propose that much of its excitement is located in those textual moments where we register its organizing, authorial presence in relation to the other voices it both interacts with and presents—those moments where we can formally examine voice, as Genette explains, "according to the traces it has left—the traces it is considered to have left—in the . . . discourse it is considered to have produced."[58]

Hughes's Obscurity

The difficulty of locating Hughes's voice might seem unlikely in a poetry that has tended to be treated as anything but difficult. In the introduction to their 1994 edition of Hughes's collected poems, Rampersad and David Roessel address Hughes's reputation for simplicity, lamenting that, "to a substantial number of readers and, especially, scholar-critics, Hughes's approach to poetry was far too simple and unlearned."[59] Simplicity, for these readers, typically connotes a transparency of meaning, seen as concomitant with what Rampersad describes as an "insistence on writing poetry that ['the black masses'] could understand."[60] Dorothy Wang's observation that, when critics read literary works by writers of color, they tend to assume such straightforward, simple expressiveness, "as if there were no such thing as the mediatedness of language," helps us to see the racialized logics behind reading Hughes's poetry as transparently "simple."[61] Over the past few decades, Hughes scholars have increasingly drawn our attention to this "mediatedness," consistently countering "the popular notion of Hughes as merely a simple poet of the people" and the commonplace that his poetry was

naively "simple" not by contesting his simplicity, exactly, but instead by acceding to and then reframing it as an aesthetic or an "artful simplicity."[62] For these critics, "Hughes's poetry is simple but not simplistic"; its simplicity signals not a lack of technique but a stylistic choice: "In a time when it was fashionable to be difficult, Hughes . . . risked being simple."[63] Hughes himself took this tack early in his career, declaring that "poetry should be direct, comprehensible and the epitome of simplicity,"[64] and his contemporary readers, too, often acknowledged his simplicity as a purposeful aesthetic: one review of *Montage* notes that, "unlike the position taken by James Joyce a few years back, Hughes is convinced that comprehensibility in poetic expression is a virtue, not a vice"; another worries that, "like Hughes's other books, the style is disarmingly simple—so simple that often the brilliant artistry may be overlooked."[65]

I concur with scholarly efforts to rescue Hughes's use of vernacular forms in poetry—the kind of poetry that the "masses . . . could understand"—from the pejorative and racialized charge of simplicity by revealing such simplicity as a deliberate aesthetic effect. Yet I am interested, too, in shifting the terms of the discussion by recognizing and exploring those moments in Hughes's work that are not artfully or only seemingly simple or transparent but instead explicitly obscure. These moments of *obscurity*, infrequent but not insignificant, interest me in that they have been identified by critics as "obvious interventions" of the authorial voice in *Montage*, paradoxically indicating that it is perhaps in the poem's more obscure passages that we discern the poet's presence most clearly.[66] What does it mean that readers have registered Hughes's "voice" in moments marked by an ambivalence toward the very idea of voice as apprehensible identity? I am further interested in these moments insofar as they also draw on the vernacular forms uniformly seen as engendering Hughes's simplicity yet hardly prove transparent in their meanings or accessibility. In these moments, the vernacular produces not the expected poetic effects of simplicity or an accessible transparency but instead effects of obscurity more often associated with literary high modernism. This vernacular obscurity suggests, as Daniel Tiffany has counterintuitively argued, that "obscurity in literary poetry owes a general and sometimes quite specific debt to vernacular forms and idioms."[67] Readers tend still to understand obscurity in the same way that Hughes's earliest audience did—as unapproachable and alienating, elitist, nearly the opposite of the "conversational simplicity" in *Montage*, which "makes for the charm and readability that produces a wide audience."[68] But Hughes's seldom-remarked

obscurity in *Montage* demonstrates a sociality shared by both the vernacular and the lyrical, producing effects that his poem positions as akin to the gossip that, I argue, presents an alternative model for his authorial voice.

Montage is punctuated, throughout, by a series of obscure passages that mimic scat's improvisational impersonations of jazz instruments and employ jive slang. For example, the opening piece, "Dream Boogie," ends:

> *Hey, pop!*
> *Re-bop!*
> *Mop!*
>
> *Y-e-a-h!* (27)

"Children's Rhymes" concludes with a comparable gesture:

> *Oop-pop-a-da!*
> *Skee! Daddle-de-do!*
> *Be-bop!*
>
> Salt'peanuts!
>
> *De-dop!* (30)

Seven other pieces in *Montage* include similar passages, almost always in conclusion.[69] Critics sometimes register traces of Hughes's poetic voice in these moments: Hokanson notes that "the authorial voice" of *Montage* often "concludes . . . with a signifying punch line," while Wheeler contends that we hear "soundings of the poet's own voice" in the poem's "hieroglyphic scat phrases."[70] If in fact we apprehend Hughes's poetic voice here, it is, far from simple, located in the puzzling spectacle of an obscure vernacular. A 1951 review notes that readers may find the language of boogie and bebop jazz at work in "the strange phrases of this little book" to be "as cryptic as the original 'Beowulf' to today's scholar"; while in his notorious 1959 review of Hughes's *Selected Poems*, James Baldwin complains that "these hieroglyphics" lack the clarity of meaning he deemed art demands: "'Hey, pop!/Re-bop!/Mop!' conveys much more on Lenox Avenue than it does in this book, which is not the way it ought to be," he grumbles.[71] A recent critical appraisal of Hughes's poetry echoes these lines of critique, quoting the ending of "Children's Rhymes" to illustrate the view that Hughes's later poetry, especially, employs "forms of speech actively resistant to appropriation by scholarship, however sympathetic the scholar to the cause."[72]

Bebop provides the most immediate context for this persistently obscure language, as the references in "Children's Rhymes" to Dizzy Gillespie's now-classic 1940s bebop tracks "Oopapada" and "Salt Peanuts" (with its Dada-esque vocal, "Salt peanuts, salt peanuts!") make clear. Shouts of "*Be-bop!*" and "*Re-bop!*" and scat vocalizing ("*Skee! Daddle-de-do!*") cement this context; more subtly, the appearance of these moments at the ends of individual poems suggests the bop tag, or brief, footnote-like musical phrase, often one that—as in the passages I have quoted above—concludes by taking the song in a different direction (Hughes makes this connection by giving the title "Tag" to one of the short pieces that includes bop vernacular) (51). This context is in keeping with the poem's more general formal reliance on the style of bebop, announced in Hughes's introductory note, where he writes, "This poem on contemporary Harlem, like be-bop, is marked by conflicting changes, sudden nuances, sharp and impudent interjections, broken rhythms, and passages sometimes in the manner of the jam session, sometimes the popular song" (21).

Yet these moments of bop vernacular are not simply "bebop vocal improvisations," nor are they, however "cryptic," as semantically "nonsensical" as the few critics who have attended to them have claimed.[73] A closely related although less often discussed context for the poem's bop moments is jive slang. "[*P*]*op*" and "*Mop*," for instance, aren't just or even primarily scat sounds but jive vocabulary: "pop," a term used to greet any male, "mop" to emphasize a completed thought or action (synonyms in this sense might be "period" or "the end").[74] When the italicized voice of "Dream Boogie" begins the poem's penultimate stanza by exclaiming "*Hey, pop!*," Hughes is thus mirroring the poem's opening line and its first voice's exclamation, "Good morning, daddy!" Critics such as Steven Tracy usefully identify "daddy" as a slang term for a man, typically one's lover: "This address . . . is common in the blues songs of females and in black culture in general," he writes, "but the term of address would not be used by a male; 'Daddy-O' would be used, but not simply 'Daddy.'"[75] Hughes's use of "daddy" elsewhere in *Montage* supports this reading of it as referring to a male lover,[76] yet Tracy and other readers, in concluding that "daddy" therefore designates a "female speaker," assume a heteronormative context for the poem and discount the established use of "Daddy" by gay men to refer to older male lovers or older gay men more generally.[77] But within the poem's seeming dialogue between two voices (designated by roman and italicized type), "*Hey, pop!*" indicates that Hughes understands *both* of these voices as male, or at least masculine (a

"daddy" and a "pop"), even as the slang term "daddy" eroticizes their exchange. Here, queer voices emerge from the obscurity of seeming nonsense in "the strange phrases of this little book."

Hughes also exceeds the seemingly nonsensical, purely sonic qualities of bop talk in ending this penultimate stanza of "Dream Boogie" with a shout of "*Mop!*" (or "the end"). "*Mop!*" semantically signals closure, but this gesture immediately is rendered a sort of false or hyper-closure, followed as it is by another stanza and its one-line affirmation, "*Y-e-a-h!*" This final line would seem to affirm the closure of "*Mop!*," yet its very gesture of affirmation critically undermines closural success. "*Y-e-a-h!*" accentuates the poem's desire to achieve closure or resolution—a desire mimetic of the deferred dreams of the Harlemites Hughes depicts—yet prepares us for the way that Hughes's long, ongoing, disruptive series of poems in *Montage* will also continually explode such neat desires. And as this affirmation of closure breaks apart into its constitutive letters and non-referential sounds, Hughes emphasizes the tenuous line, everywhere toed by his poem's speakers, between voice and noise.

Much more could be said about the meanings and effects of Hughes's jive slang in "Dream Boogie." For my purposes, I want simply to suggest how the presence of these jive terms contradicts characterizations of bop talk in *Montage* as purely musical, "nonlexical performance" or nonsense.[78] Rather, these passages are, as I have described them, obscure: not immediately or wholly or necessarily ever apprehended, but not inapprehensible. According to Dan Burley, columnist and editor in the 1940s for the black weekly *New York Amsterdam News*, "the new jive language" presented a "seemingly incomprehensible idiom" that distinguished itself from "Harlem's language in the days of the Black Renaissance" by reflecting its cultural moment in an inventive "*language of action*, which comes from the bars, the dance-halls, the prisons, the honkey-tonks, gin mills, etc., wherever people are busy living, loving, fighting, working, or conniving to get the better of one another" (92). In this way, jive resonates with the challenging new jazz sound of bebop, whose musical dissonance, distinct from the sound of the Harlem Renaissance, paralleled the social dissonance of postwar Harlem and provided Hughes with a potent motif and form for his meditation on Harlem in *Montage*. Concurrent with and attendant to his interest in exploring the art and social functions of bop, Hughes's specific interest in the spectacle of jive is evident in the "Simple" stories he began writing in 1943 and the humorous, jive-peppered speech of the Harlemite character Jesse B. Semple, or Simple

(who at one point declares, for example, "I bull-jive around with lots of cats in bars").[79] This interest led Hughes to urge Burley to write his 1944 "handbook" documenting the enigmatic slang that, Burley reports, Hughes "felt . . . was developing and attracting so much attention" (9).[80] Just a few years later, in *Montage*, Hughes himself staged the alluring spectacle of bop's and jive's obscurity.

One of the functions of jive slang in *Montage* is, as in the handbook Hughes encouraged, an archival one, an effort to preserve, like Burley, obscure "bit[s] of conversation" and the spaces that foster them: talk that, Burley writes, "could have been recorded on the corner of 126th Street and Seventh Avenue, where, it seems, most of the good jive conversations are held" (15). Compare, for instance, Burley's jive definition of "Marijuana-Weed—*Reefer, roach, Hemp, Rope, Tea*" (76) with Hughes's four-line piece, in *Montage*, entitled "Gauge":

> Hemp . . . .
> A stick . . . .
> A roach . . . .
> Straw . . . . (48)

"Gauge" seems almost to be translating Burley's lexical entry, with which Hughes was surely familiar, into poetic form. Burley and Hughes each list five slang terms for marijuana (sharing two in common) and exhibit a shared impulse to record the inventive diction of jive talk. But unlike Burley, whose effort is to decode obscure jive slang for the uninitiated, Hughes's riddle insistently displays its own obscurity. For Henry Atmore, such obscure experiments with black vernacular in Hughes's poetry of the 1950s seem anti-archival, "a secret language" that "appears to make no concession at all to posterity."[81] Yet they are better understood as counter-archival, frustrating the archive's conventional protocols while yet preserving, like "Gauge," the obscurity of jive performance as itself a productive phenomenon. In "Gauge," no privileged term defines the others; instead, beginning with the piece's title, each line generates another synonym that elliptically circles its unspoken definition, repeatedly inviting an outsider's scrutiny yet making an obstinate spectacle of obscurity. Presenting a series of possible conclusions that (as in "Dream Boogie") defer closure, Hughes's ellipses favor the possibilities of his riddle's ongoing guessing game over the satisfactions of firm resolution and suggest that the piece's obscurity is less a failure of meaning—as Baldwin might have it—than an alternative form of it. His el-

lipses index the piece's obscurity, measuring the space (themselves perhaps a "Gauge," or the instrument of measure also referred to by Hughes's multivalent title) in which outsiders puzzle over the riddling presence before them while the knowing voice of the piece imagines its next move.

This poetic space, in bringing together initiates, as well as strangers, in a set of relations produced by obscure rather than simple expression, indicates a second, social function for jive slang in *Montage*. Jive is, per Burley, "Harlem slang," a "style of talking and writing," but can also refer to social activities such as "hot music, hot dancing" and more generally to "a manner of living and thinking" (141). Accordingly, the linguistic obscurity of jive is bound up with the obscure forms of social affiliation that it reflects and fosters. Tiffany reminds us that the term "obscurity" denotes both uncertain verbal meaning and forms of social being perceived as unillustrious, humble, or low; he writes, "Being enveloped by obscurity in a social sense—a kind of social death, one might say—resembles the act of erasure, the partial disappearance, produced by verbal obscurity."[82] Burley's account of jive talk shares this understanding of jive's obscurity as at once verbal and social. For black Americans, "pressed against the wall for centuries, deprived of the advantages of complete social, economic, moral and intellectual freedom," jive, Burley contends, "is a defense mechanism, a method of deriving pleasure from something the uninitiated cannot understand" (11).[83] Hughes's jive in *Montage* seeks not just to depict such vivifying pleasure but to animate it for those readers in the know.[84] Noting the poem's use of "black jive slang," Steven C. Tracy asserts that, by using "words . . . readily identifiable with black culture," if not necessarily "code words that whites were unlikely to understand," Hughes signals an intended black audience within his broader readership.[85] In this way, his jive maps a world within a world, or, one might say in the terms of *Montage*, a "Dream within a dream,/Our dream deferred" (77).

For Hughes, mapping the deprivations and pleasures of this alternative terrain is vital: in the piece "Motto," one of his poem's several Harlem speakers declares, "I play it cool/And dig all jive/that's the reason/I stay alive" (39). Hughes elaborates these social dimensions of bop vernacular more generally in a 1949 Simple column on the topic of "Bop." As Simple sings along to "an old Dizzy Gillespie record" ("Ool-ya-koo," he sang. "Hey Ba-Ba-Re-Bop! Be-Bop! Mop!"), his unnamed friend (and our narrator) comments, "It all sounds like pure nonsense syllables to me." Simple immediately rejects this characterization of bop ("Nonsense, nothing!"), complaining, "Folks

who ain't suffered much cannot play Bop, neither appreciate it. They think Bop is nonsense." The "crazy" sound of bop, Simple explains, emerges from and protests the moral craziness of police violence and the white supremacy it signifies. Bop comes "[f]rom the police beating Negroes' heads [. . .]. Every time a cop hits a Negro with his billy club, that old club says 'BOP! BOP! BOP! . . . BE-BOP . . . MOP! . . . BOP!' That Negro hollers, 'Oooolya-koo! Ou-o-o!' [. . .] That's where Be-Bop came from, beaten right out of some Negro's head into them horns and saxophones and piano keys that plays it. Do you call that nonsense?"[86] For Simple, bop and the jive slang that populates its supposed "nonsense syllables" create a spectacle of verbal obscurity, one that seduces and eludes outsiders ("those who ain't suffered much") while speaking to the initiated ("Them young colored kids who started it, they know what Bop is"), transforming the damaging effacements of social obscurity into a defiantly obscure assertion of community, voice, and personhood that is decidedly not nonsense.[87]

We might think of these moments of obscurity in *Montage* in terms of Édouard Glissant's revaluing of opacity as a rejection of the violent demand for comprehension in Western thought, of the insistence that nondominant lives and cultures be made intelligible in terms of dominant values.[88] "A person," Glissant asserts, "has the right to be opaque."[89] Fred Moten positions this (in Saidiya Hartman's words) "right to obscurity" as

> a political imperative that infuses the unfinished project of emancipation as well as any number of other transitions or crossings in progress. It corresponds to the need for the fugitive, the immigrant and the new (and newly constrained) citizen to hold something in reserve, to keep a secret. The history of Afro-diasporic art, especially music, is, it seems to me, the history of the keeping of this secret even in the midst of its intensely public and highly commodified dissemination.[90]

Moten's description of obscurity as expressing a "need . . . to hold something in reserve" brings to mind Burley's account of jive as "a defense mechanism, a method of deriving pleasure from something the uninitiated cannot understand." By extension, it suggests how Hughes's use of bop talk and jive slang in *Montage*—"even in the midst of its . . . highly commodified dissemination"—serves as an assertion *and* scrambling of the idea of poetic voice, one that, in relocating lyric subjectivity to the realm of obscurity, resists a midcentury lyrical ideal of transparent universality that would exclude the irreducible singularities of black or queer experience.

Indeed, although *Montage*'s obscure passages might seem to present the

incongruity of an obscure vernacular and Hughes's apparently "simple," accessible poetry, they rather demonstrate an affinity between the verbal fashioning of jive talk and of poetry. Burley's handbook, in fact, repeatedly emphasizes how jive depends on poetic techniques. Encountering the obscurity of jive talk on the streets of Harlem, he writes, "you listen in breathless fascination as they exchange verbal bombshells, rhymed and lyrical, and although you do not know it, you are listening to the new poetry of the proletariat" (92). If the foregrounding of this link between jive and poetry throughout the handbook is perhaps its most surprising feature, it helps to explain Hughes's particular interest in Burley's engagement with jive. Hughes makes a related link between bop talk and vernacular poetry in his 1955 educational work for young readers, *The First Book of Jazz*: "Sometimes for fun," he explains,

> singers sing "oo-ya-koo" syllables to boppish backgrounds today, as Cab Calloway in the 1930s sang "hi-de-hi-de-ho-de-hey," meaning nothing, or as Lionel Hampton sang "hey-baba-re-bop" in 1940, or as Louis Armstrong used to sing "scat" syllables to his music in Chicago in the 1920s, or as Jelly Roll Morton shouted meaningless words to ragtime music in the early 1900s, or as the Mother Goose rhyme said, "Hey-diddle-diddle, the cat and the fiddle," even before that—for fun.[91]

As we have seen, this explanation of bop vernacular as pure "fun," "meaning nothing," would seem alien to the character of Simple—who ends Hughes's column on bop by declaring to his auditor, who finds no meaning in bop talk, "Your nonsense depresses me"[92]—and it most likely reflects Hughes's awareness, here, of his young audience (228). But in connecting bop to *Mother Goose*, Hughes interestingly echoes Burley's inclusion, throughout his handbook, of jive parodies of vernacular and literary poems ranging from John Greenleaf Whittier's "The Barefoot Boy" ("Blessings on Thee, Little Square,/ Barefoot Cat with the unconked hair"), to Joyce Kilmer's "Trees" ("I think that I shall never dig/ A spiel as righteous as a twig"), to Clement Clark Moore's "A Visit from St. Nicholas" ("'Twas the dim before Nicktide, and all through the Crib,/ You could hear Joe Hipp spieling that righteous ad lib"), to Shakespeare (he presents a "Jive Hamlet" and "Jive Othello") (21, 69, 25, 29, 40). These parodies sometimes play with the disparity between jive's difficulty and vernacular poetry's simplicity, but more often they highlight the shared inventiveness and obscurity of jive and poetry, each a language that, in resisting demands for intelligibility, offers alternative pleasures.

Montage also underscores this correspondence. In the poem's passages

of bop vernacular, Hughes both performs and contemplates the expectations of poetic voice, thinking through how written vocal sounds can create effects of presence. In Hughes's "Bop" column, his narrator hears only nonsense in the bop vocalizing that Simple understands as an assertion of voice and personhood, and the bop passages in *Montage* can likewise read, as in the conclusion of "Dream Boogie," as both voice and noise—as at once, as Burley writes of jive, "a language of emotion: a means of describing how one is affected by certain experiences and situations," and what "to an outsider . . . might sound like the most utter, complete and childish nonsense" (73, 74). The spectacle of jive's obscurity invites and frustrates our understanding, refusing to naturalize the production of poetic voice to which it instead draws our attention. In this way, the poem's recurring use of bop vernacular points to an ongoing vocal presence that, obscure in both verbal and social senses, is never neatly synonymous with the poet but nonetheless reflects his precarious, organizing authorial perspective.

Among *Montage*'s bop passages, this perspective appears most distinctly in those pieces like "Tag," "Figurine," and "Figurette," that punctuate preceding exchanges with a sort of musical commentary ambiguously situated within and without the poem's diegesis. Consider, for example, the following sequence:

> **Question**
>
> Said the lady, *Can you do*
> *what my other man can't do—*
> *That is*
> *Love me, daddy—*
> *and feed me, too?*
>
> **Figurine**
>
> *De-dop!* (32)

A jazz figurine is a brief musical embellishment; in his experimental 1961 volume, *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz*, Hughes associates it with the signifying response, instructing that "*after each 'Ask your mama' line*" the poem should be accompanied by a "*musical figurine*," which "*may incorporate the impudent little melody of the old break, 'Shave and a haircut, fifteen cents.'*"[93] Jive slang often serves a similarly "impudent" function: Burley, tracing the etymology of jive, notes, "In the sense in which it came into use among Negroes in Chicago about the year 1921," jive referred to "an expression of

sarcastic comment" (71). Accordingly, the figurines, or figurettes, or tags in *Montage* often present musical ripostes—or what Hughes calls in his prefatory note "sharp and impudent interjections"—in the vernacular of bop and jive (21). In the sequence above, "*De-dop!*" serves as just such an interjection: it does not answer the "Question" to which this "Figurine" responds but interrupts and embellishes it, emphasizing that the question ("*Can you do / what my other man can't do*") is a rhetorical one, meant to call out a lover's empty boasts, and serving, further, to stress the economic conditions in postwar Harlem that shape the lady's question and her lover's failed promises. In place of the response of this "*daddy*" we hear the "impudent little melody" of the figurine, one that voices instead "an expression of sarcastic comment" on the social premises of the question itself, which defy easy answers.

Who voices this figurine? "Question" displays two voices: a narrating voice, indicated by one of the poem's very rare speech tags ("[s]aid the lady"), and the reported speech of the "lady" herself. Although the voice of "Figurine" shares with the first voice in "Question" a narrating impulse and with the second a use of jive slang, by setting this voice off in its own individually titled piece, Hughes distinguishes it from each of these preceding voices.[94] This remove to another voice and what seems another level of narrative, while subtle, significantly frames "Figurine" as a comment on the *narration* of "Question," one that asks the reader to think not only about the lady's question but about the stories that circulate about her posing of this question. Is the genteel identification of her as a "lady"—unconventional insofar as she frankly admits to having two lovers and lacking social position or means—a dig meant to challenge the desire expressed in her question, or a defiant assertion, meant to dignify it? Does this identification reflect or respond to the lady's own perhaps unconventional use of "*daddy*" to describe a man whose ability to provide for his lover is called into question? How do the economic realities and discourses of postwar Harlem shape understandings and negotiations of gender, sexuality, and desire?[95] Putting such questions before us, "Figurine" reveals itself as one of those moments in which we perceive Hughes's authorial voice and "the traces it has left," as Genette might say, "in the narrative discourse it is considered to have produced." That we register Hughes's voice, here, suggests that it is sometimes in the poem's most obscure moments—in the seeming nonsense of "*De-dop!*" and its difficult-to-place speaker—that we most clearly sense the poet's voice.[96]

In this case, we hear that voice in what we might also understand as a moment of gossip: the recirculation of and implicit commentary on someone

else's story, here a secondhand account of an exchange between a "lady" and her lover. This coincidence of obscurity and gossip exemplifies the way that Hughes more generally parallels the "impudent" commentary of bop vernacular at work in his figurines, figurettes, and tags with the commentary that appears in pieces like "Comment on Stoop," "Comment against Lamp Post," and "Comment on Curb." Whereas bop and jive talk are the vernacular context for the tag or figurine, gossip is the primary context for these comment pieces. *Montage*'s moments of bop vernacular and gossipy comment share structural positions within the poem (typically serving as endings—whether to individual pieces or larger sequences—that provide concluding commentary). They share a setting in public spaces of vernacular practice (like the jive that Burley claims "could have been recorded on the corner of 126th Street and Seventh Avenue," Hughes locates his poem's gossip on Harlem's stoops, curbs, and streets). They share a sense of obscurity (both in terms of an uncertainty as to who is speaking and, as forms of talk exclusive to particular and often marginalized communities, in terms of the immediate import of what is being said). And, finally, they share an assertion of authorial voice modeled on black vernacular performance. If I have lingered on the effects of Hughes's bop talk and its spectacle of obscurity, then, it is in order to provide a fuller sense of the vernacular landscape out of which the voice of gossip—that is, the poet's voice—emerges in *Montage*, echoing through the poem's gossipy comment pieces, which now deserve comment.

Reading the Comments: The Voice of Gossip

Hughes's prefatory note to *Montage*, which frames the poem "in terms of current Afro-American popular music and the sources from which it has progressed," prepares us to heed "Dream Boogie" and its opening imperative to "[l]isten closely" as a directive to attend to the sounds of postwar bebop as they quietly rumble along, and sometime erupt from, the surfaces of everyday Harlem—an instruction to listen for both the social unease and alternative rhythms of living embedded in this bop soundscape (21, 27).[97] It is such an instruction. But the imperative to "[l]isten" is equally an invitation to gossip ("Ain't you heard"?), an admonition to keep one's ear to the ground ("Listen to it closely: / Ain't you heard / something underneath") and be alive to both the matter and the method of what the poem later calls the " 'They say' . . . 'They say' . . . 'They say' . . ." of "the gossips" (27, 70). The gossips in *Montage* have much to say: they casually dish about neighborhood children ("Some of these young ones is cert'ly bad" [29]); about illicit affairs ("That

little Negro's married and got a kid./ Why does he keep on foolin' around Marie?" [30]); about unscrupulous landlords ("my landlady's so old/ her features is all run together/ and God knows she sure can overcharge" [31]); about their friends ("my buddy . . . works downtown for Twelve a week./ Has to give his mother Ten" [32]); about the dead ("[i]nsurance man, he did not pay . . ./ Yet they got a satin box/ For his head to lay" [65]) and their survivors ("[s]quares/ Who couldn't dig him,/ Plant him now" [40]); about known figures in the community such as a "Dancer" ("he didn't have much sense./ He was no good at making love/ and no good at making money" [41]), a "Wine-O" (and later a "Drunkard" [42, 49]), a war veteran ("[h]e walks like his soldiering/ Days are done" [65]), Harlem's Jewish shopkeepers ("[s]ome folks blame high prices on the Jews" [72]), and bop musicians ("[l]ittle cullud boys in berets . . . horse a fantasy of days"[46]); about interracial couples ("[i]nto the laps/ of black celebrities/ white girls fall" [47]); and about queers, or "fairies" ("[*d*]*egenerates*,/ some folks say" [48]). Gossip, in *Montage*, becomes another way to chart and navigate "the riffs, runs, breaks, and disc-tortions of the music of a community in transition" (21). In critical treatments of the poem, however, its pervasive gossip has been swallowed up in the blare of bop, even though, as Brunner observes, Hughes's Harlem is "a world defined by its peppery rhythms: speech rhythms that arise in relation to musical rhythms, which together construct a discursive environment."[98] Indeed, throughout *Montage* we can hear, alongside Hughes's bop, "the disparate voices of the community gossiping and commenting on various matters," as Jemie notes.[99] Those pieces explicitly labeled "Comment" emblematize the presence and workings of gossip in the poem more generally and provide one place we might begin to "[l]isten to it closely."

Let's listen:

Sister

That little Negro's married and got a kid.
Why does he keep on foolin' around Marie?
Marie's my sister—not married to me—
But why does *he* keep on foolin' around Marie?
Why don't she get a boy-friend
I can understand—some decent man?

Did it ever occur to you, son,
the reason Marie runs around with trash
is she wants some cash?

Don't decent folks have dough?

Unfortunately usually no!

Well, anyway, it don't have to be a married man.

Did it ever occur to you, boy,
that a woman does the best she can?

Comment on Stoop

So does a man. (30–31)

The gossip in "Sister" between Marie's young brother (he is referred to as "*son*" and "*boy*") and an older speaker or speakers who situate Marie's behavior (and that of her "boy-friend") within the economic realities of 1940s Harlem telescopes out in "Comment on Stoop" to take in the remark of an overhearing presence located on the stoop, that traditional space of black vernacular performance, especially gossip. The urban stoop, positioned between the privacy of the home and the public street, presents a liminal space in which wide-ranging negotiations of this boundary between the private and public take place. More than simply a physical space, the stoop gives rise to what Monique Taylor describes in her study of Harlem as "stoop culture."[100] Gossip is the characteristic form of this culture and its exploration of the uncertain line between private and public life, individual and communal values. As the sociolinguists Adam Jaworski and Justine Coupland demonstrate, gossip thrives in "marginalized, liminal, or uncertain social spaces."[101] The liminal space of the Harlem stoop, Taylor writes, "provides a stage not just for face-to-face interactions but also for gaining more intimate knowledge about important events, crises, and life changes in a neighbor's family."[102] In this way, and by particularly offering "a vantage point for incidents that violate decorum," the stoop provides a ready supply of the stuff of gossip: that material that demands a consideration of a community's norms and their effects.[103] In "Sister" and "Comment on Stoop," the stoop grants access to "intimate knowledge" of Marie and her married boyfriend, but even more to how Marie's family feels about this relationship. Each contribution to this exchange of gossip complicates conventional conclusions about the motivations and morality of Marie, her brother, and—by the time we reach the stoop, the final link in this chain of gossip—her lover, unsettling as much as affirming community norms.

The stoop, here, not only takes its place among what James de Jongh describes as "Hughes's frequent evocations of the communal spaces where

African Americans lived their lives in public";[104] it governs our understanding of the many such spaces—evoked by titles like "Movies," "Neon Signs," "Corner Meeting," "Bar," "Cafe: 3 A.M.," "Street Song," "125th Street," and "Subway Rush Hour"—that appear in *Montage*. In "Neighbor," for example, Hughes establishes a link between the southern porch, the urban stoop, and the neighborhood bar as spaces of gossip. The piece begins:

> Down home
> he sets on a stoop
> and watches the sun go by.
> In Harlem
> when his work is done
> he sets in the bar with a beer. (68)

The remainder of this brief piece presents the gossip of two voices about their inscrutable "[n]eighbor" at the bar, who "looks taller than he is/and younger than he ain't," as well as "darker than he is" (68). One voice contends, "[H]e's smarter than he looks"; the second objects, "*He ain't smart./That cat's a fool*" (68–69). The first worries that "when he drinks,/he drinks fast"; the second notes, "*Sometimes/he don't drink*" (69). Through these voices' selection and integration of observational details, and their conversational moves that check for, qualify, and affirm truth (as in sentences beginning "Naw," "In fact," "But," "*Sometimes*," and "True"), Hughes depicts the construction of shared knowledge at stake in gossip about one's neighbor, here a barroom activity that he ties to the space of the stoop (69). The "stoop" that the neighbor who serves as the object of this piece's gossip sat on "[d]own home" in the South, before his implied migration north to Harlem, was more likely a *porch*; in eliding the semantic and geographical distance between the two, Hughes suggests the way that Harlem's many migrants from the rural South adapted the life of the southern porch and its conversation, storytelling, and gossip to the urban stoop, the culture of which becomes exemplary of other urban spaces poised ambiguously between the private and the public—in this case the bar.[105]

"It has been the longstanding practice of African American verbal culture," de Jongh writes, "to transform literal spaces into topical spaces for rhetorical and figurative purposes";[106] in *Montage*, Harlem's literal spaces of gossip, such as the stoop, become topical spaces by which Hughes produces the figure of poetic voice. In "Comment on Stoop," to return to that piece, the title functions as an extradialogic stage direction that both locates the remark that

follows in a space of gossip and alerts us to the presence of an authorial voice. However, the formal location of this title is itself uncertain—as a paratextual title, it is both within and outside of the poem proper, an uncertainty accentuated by Hughes's revision of *Montage* for his *Selected Poems*, where "Comment on Stoop" is combined with and subsumed within the text of "Sister," and its title appears as a line of text.[107] This formal uncertainty as to whether the poem's organizing perspective should be heard within or at the threshold of the text reflects the elusiveness of Hughes's voice in *Montage*. That it also reflects the liminal positioning of the semiprivate, semipublic voice on the stoop, which is both part of and apart from the exchange in "Sister," suggests how Hughes draws on and imagines the stoop's voice of gossip as a model for his own poetic voice. Like the space of the cab in "Jitney," the stoop in "Comment on Stoop" is nearly animated, or given voice, as if the disembodied, gossipy comment that emanates from it is attributed to it. Differently put, the stoop appears as a space of performance that records and recirculates voices, much like gossip, or, for that matter, like a poem.

Hughes further allies the poet and the gossip by situating the traces of each within resonant spaces that host the vocal effects of echo. The gossipy echoes of *Montage*'s comments, figurines, and tags also raise questions about poetic voice; indeed, it seems, as John Hollander has shown, "inevitable that the trope of echo should come to stand for crucial questions about poetic language itself."[108] As a poetic term that designates a repetition of sound or language, echo encompasses, as Hollander explains, "such phenomena as reduplication, alliteration, assonance, and full rhyme."[109] In *Montage*, Hughes frequently employs such sonic techniques in service of echo. We might even read "Comment on Stoop," which reduplicates, curtails, and scrambles the assertion "*a woman does the best she can*" into the qualified, rhyming, rhetorical echo, "[*s*]*o does a man*," as a loose version—a modern echo—of the classical echo song, which repeats the final syllables of its lines to create an often ironic commentary or series of replies, as in George Herbert's famous 1633 example of the form, "Heaven," comprised of lines like "Thou Echo, thou art mortal, all men know. / *Echo*. No."[110] Hughes himself seems to have understood his poem's comments in this way: in *Montage*'s "World War II," the repeated exclamation, "What a grand time was the war! / Oh, my, my!" is met with what Hughes labels an "Echo: / *Did* / *Somebody* / *Die?*" (61). This "Echo," formatted in the same manner as the rejoinders of Hughes's figurines, figurettes, tags, and comments, and providing a similarly sarcastic commentary, uses the full rhyme of "my" and "[*d*]*ie*" to point up

the tacit human cost of individual prosperity during wartime economic boom.[111] Here, as in the form of the echo song, "a contrary or self-emending meaning is shown to have been implicit in the original affirmation."[112] And, as in the myth of Echo more generally, Hughes's rhetorical echoes appear as personified auditory presences: in "World War II" as the figure of Echo, elsewhere in *Montage*, as we have seen, in figures such as the voice of the neighbor or the voice of the stoop. Each personification presents an iteration of the figure of the gossip—fittingly, since Echo has often been cast as what Shakespeare calls "the babbling gossip of the air"—and asserts, as in gossip, an individual voice constructed out of the repeated stories, and often language, of others.[113] If the trope of echo entails questions about how a reflection of sound or language, emerging from a resonant space, can create intimate effects of presence, so, too, does *Montage*, where Hughes's authorial voice, like the voice of the gossip, resounds as an echo of others' speech—the sonic residue of his poem's rapid montage of colliding bits of talk.

We can trace these workings of echo in the second comment sequence in *Montage*, set "against Lamp Post"—another Harlem space animated, like the stoop, by the cultural imaginary, as seen in the popular saying of the Harlem Renaissance era, "I'd rather be a lamppost in Harlem than the governor of Georgia." This sequence shares each of the key features of the first: it presents a scene of overhearing and gossip involving "intimate knowledge about important events, crises, and life changes in a neighbor's family"; it occurs in what is framed as both a literal and figurative site of black vernacular performance, here the space of the street corner and its "Lamp Post," where, to recall Burley, "most of the good jive conversations are held"; and it ends with an echo, both sonic and rhetorical, of the voices the poem has accumulated up to that point. In addition, this sequence most explicitly parallels the gossipy voice of the poem's comments with the "impudent" commentary that, as we have seen, Hughes also attributes to bop vernacular, suggesting his understanding of the obscurity of bop and gossip as two interrelated models for poetic voice in *Montage*. The sequence reads:

What? So Soon!

I believe my old lady's
pregnant again!

Fate must have
some kind of trickeration

to populate
the cullud nation!

Comment against Lamp Post

You call it fate?

Figurette

De-daddle-dy!
De-dop! (38–39)

This brief sequence (just three titles and nine lines of verse) involves at least three voices: the initial speaker; the overhearing voice situated against the "Lamp Post"; the bop talk of the figurette; and the poem's organizing, authorial voice, which we perceive, if not in the figurette itself, as scholars have sometimes suggested, then in the titles of "Comment against Lamp Post" and "Figurette." (I say *at least* three voices since the last two might be understood as the same voice, and since the interjection "What? So Soon!" could belong to the first of the sequence's speakers, or could present, perhaps proleptically, the response of yet another voice to his predicament, or could represent—in a more conversational mode—the authorial perspective of the sequence's other titles.) In most works, the number of voices (three? four? five?) crowding around this short sequence's "Lamp Post" would be remarkable, yet Hokanson rightly finds the "multiple dimensions of this simple exchange"—its status as "overheard speech" and, at a further remove, as "a signifying retort" that "puts the speaker's complaint into a broader, more profound context"—"typical of Hughes's vernacular style throughout *Montage*."[114] With each new voice the first speaker's initial "complaint" is, in fact, held in new contexts, as his surprise opens onto the inevitability of fate and then again onto the agency of design (potentially at work in individual choice or an economic structure that systematically limits one's choice). Extending Hokanson's assessment, though, I want to underscore how this typical sequence doesn't simply move among its montage's several voices, or into different (not necessarily "broader") contexts, but also shifts narrative levels as each voice finds itself part of another voice's gradually more obscure account (this exchange is indeed far from "simple"). If "What? So Soon!" initially reads as a straightforward dramatic monologue, "Comment against Lamp Post" transforms it into the reported speech of the gossip perched against the lamppost (or perhaps into part of a dialogue with this gossipy voice, although Hughes's use of italics for this voice and the lack of a re-

sponse to it instead suggests a different narrative level). "Figurette," in turn, either contributes its obscure sonic embellishment to the gossipy retort emanating from against the lamppost or passes it on with a gossipy framing of its own. Finally, the authorial perspective implicit in the titles of these pieces represents the outermost narrative level, one that, in presenting this entire sequence of voices, turns their disclosures into acts themselves disclosed by the voice of not only the poem but of the gossip.

At each narrative level, then, the chain of gossip transforms subjects into objects as their story becomes someone else's. But even more than the transformations of each voice into, ultimately, the object of the authorial perspective's gossip, I am interested in how that ostensibly controlling perspective in fact depends on these voices, which give rise to it. At each level, the voice we apprehend contains echoes of, and is in some sense engendered by, that which precedes it: the overhearing, gossipy presence "against Lamp Post" echoes (as it questions) the initial speaker's term "fate," the voice of "Figurette" echoes that speaker's jive slang ("trickeration") and augments the comment's retort, and the organizing perspective implicit in the titles echoes the vernacular and tone of each respective piece. As in the myth of Echo, each subsequent voice in Hughes's sequence does not originate discourse but seemingly can only reply to it, loosely using the device of echo to tease out contradictory yet implicit possibilities of prior voices. Voice in this sequence is also, as with Echo, increasingly disembodied and difficult to place. Where the initial voice is immediately embodied in a specific gender and sexuality ("I believe my old lady's/ pregnant again!") and race (part of the "cullud nation"), the relatively disembodied and anonymous voices that follow float around the "Lamp Post" or are abstracted into the musical "Figurette," culminating in an obscure authorial voice that most appears in the threshold spaces of paratext, never even quite within or without the body of the poem itself.[115]

It is therefore not the case—at least in any simple way—that this sequence of accumulating voices and perspectives becomes clearer as its apparently "simple exchange" proceeds. Concurring with Hokanson's sense that these pieces place "the speaker's complaint into a broader, more profound context," Brunner states that the "obvious mode of operation" in *Montage* is "to intrigue with anecdotes that necessitate the summoning of larger explanatory contexts."[116] I agree that the contexts that the poem's gossip summons for its intriguing anecdotes do invite us to view its Harlem scenarios in more and more complex and often unconventional ways, yet these contexts tend to be more local and nuanced than broad and more

obscure than obviously "explanatory." "Figurette" punctuates this sequence not by providing a broad or explanatory context but by burrowing into the obscurity of bop and jive slang—marginalized, insider languages whose import might be lost on the uninitiated but whose insights are not, as I have argued, nonsense. When read in the context of the sequence's gossip and the poem's jive slang, this bop voice appears, like the gossipy commentary with which Hughes aligns it, as an echo of those voices that precede it, one that—however obscure or for initiates only—advances its own gossipy commentary in the vernacular of jive. Within the apparent nonsense sounds of "*De-daddle-dy!*" lurk the words *daddy* (as in father, lover, or both), *diddle* (slang for sex), *daddle* (slang for masturbation), *diddle-daddle* (slang for nonsense, or for wasting time unproductively) and *diddly* (slang for something of little or no value).[117] If how, precisely, these terms speak to the unplanned pregnancy that spurs this poetic sequence of gossip is obscure, that they do so is clear: the sequence's talk is, after all, about a diddling rather than daddling daddy who finds himself once again a daddy with diddly and whose notion that "fate" must be behind his dilemma is seen by the gossip on the corner as diddle-daddle, or nonsense. Through its playful alliteration, the "Figurette"—both "*little melody*" and "interjection," bop and gossip—encourages such "impudent" wordplay and makes a spectacle of its obscurity, one that seduces with a knowledge, a sociality, and an authorial presence that, while not unintelligible, resides just beyond legibility.

In *Montage*'s final comment sequence, we again sense the obscure presence of the poem's organizing, authorial voice in relation to the montage of voices it presents. This sequence of two pieces, "Same in Blues" and "Comment on Curb," represents the poem's fullest exploration of its authorial voice as gossipy echo:

Same in Blues

I said to my baby,
Baby, take it slow.
I can't, she said, I can't!
I got to go!

There's a certain
amount of traveling
in a dream deferred.

Lulu said to Leonard,
I want a diamond ring.

Leonard said to Lulu,
You won't get a goddamn thing!

A certain
amount of nothing
in a dream deferred.

Daddy, daddy, daddy,
All I want is you.
You can have me, baby—
but my lovin' days is through.

A certain
amount of impotence
in a dream deferred.

Three parties
On my party line—
But that third party,
Lord, ain't mine!

There's liable
to be confusion
in a dream deferred.

From river to river,
Uptown and down,
There's liable to be confusion
when a dream gets kicked around.

Comment on Curb

You talk like
they don't kick
dreams around
Downtown.

I expect they do—
But I'm talking about
Harlem to you! (75-76)

"Same in Blues" more neatly structures the interaction among multiple voices and narrative levels that occupies Hughes throughout *Montage*. When in the first line the speaker begins to recount an earlier exchange, or what "I said to my baby," we understand this reported dialogue ("Baby, take it

slow") as, in narratological terms, the intradiegetic voice of an extradiegetic speaker: a story embedded within the piece's overall story. The subsequent stanza, however, introduces another voice and a new narrative level, marked by the italicized, echoing refrain. The voice of this refrain feels authorial in that, as Tracy writes, the refrain lines "represent a kind of external, intellectual generalization of the various situations depicted" in the verses, which are distilled in the refrain's variations into a series of keywords: "*traveling*," "*nothing*," "*impotence*," "*confusion*."[118] Furthering our sense of this voice as authorial, the blues form here encourages "the audience to repeat the refrain with the 'singer.' "[119] Thus we now understand the refrain's organizing perspective as extradiegetic, and what seemed to be in the first stanza the report of an intradiegetic exchange now appears to be the metadiegetic dialogue of a story within a story within the piece's overall story.

As we have seen, such dizzying presence of multiple narrative levels is common to gossip and the voices that accumulate as it recirculates other people's stories. Hughes again evinces this connection by making the third stanza's voice unambiguously gossipy as it dishes what "Lulu said to Leonard" and "Leonard said to Lulu." Tracy, approaching the piece primarily as an example of blues form, reads in its verses a continuous, developing narrative about Lulu and Leonard.[120] This reading, however, doesn't address the pronoun switch that occurs between the first and third stanza ("I" and "she" versus "Lulu" and "Leonard"), which suggests that at least some of these verses are spoken by different voices. Hence, whether "Same in Blues" presents an ongoing story or a series of thematically linked anecdotes about the relationship between desire and the "*dream deferred*," it is a narrative passed on, as in gossip, by a number of speakers and from a number of perspectives, culminating in the authorial voice that orchestrates this gossipy montage. In reflecting and offering its own commentary on the talk of each verse, the authorial voice of the refrain rhetorically and sonically *echoes*—a soundscape typographically signaled by Hughes's use of italics—and becomes gossip.

This voice of gossip is exemplified by Hughes's introduction, in the seventh stanza, of an eavesdropping "third party" on a "party line" telephone. Party telephone lines were common in the United States in the early twentieth century, particularly in rural areas. These lines, shared among typically four to eight but up to as many twenty to thirty subscribers, were cheaper than individual lines yet entailed a sacrifice of privacy: calls to one's household were signaled by a unique ring, but anyone on the party line could pick

up the receiver to interrupt and ask to make their own call or to secretly eavesdrop on the conversation.[121] As B. Ruby Rich writes, party lines served as "invitations to eavesdropping, so that secrets could be harvested 'on line' and shared with neighbors."[122] In this way, party lines facilitated and became a cultural figure for the gossip that can, on the one hand, fuel damaging play with the reputations of others and, on the other, help to foster group affiliation and intimacy, and enable one to map and negotiate one's community.[123] Hughes's use of this figure for gossip in *Montage*, however, is curious. By the time of the poem's composition in 1948, party telephone lines had long vanished from New York City, which had converted entirely to individual lines as early as 1930.[124] Yet party lines were still the norm in much of rural, postwar America, as Hughes himself observed in a 1947 essay in the *Chicago Defender*: in the South, he writes, "there are . . . more party line telephones, and somebody else is almost always using the line."[125] That Hughes's Harlem voice in "Same in Blues" presumably isn't, then, invoking an actual "party line" only underlines its effects as a figure for gossip, one that—as with the poem's depiction of the stoop and its adaptation of southern porch culture—connects the urban culture of dish in Harlem to a history of everyday, black vernacular with its roots in the rural South.[126]

Like gossip, and in some sense like the lyric poem, party line telephony occupied a liminal space in which private talk circulated publicly. Despite obvious differences, telephone talk, like the lyric, frequently has been understood as overheard speech: "From the beginning of telephony," writes Claude Fischer, "people expressed concern that they were being overheard, at first simply by others in the same room—one had to speak loudly—and then by operators or fellow subscribers on a party line."[127] Party line conversations often carried on *as if* in private, even while assuming the possibility of an overhearing presence that would make one's private talk public. If this likely presence became too overt—whether through audible breathing or background noise or a drop in volume caused by too many households and too little voltage on the line—it was sometimes acknowledged directly, in an effort to shame eavesdroppers into hanging up. Something like this seems to happen in Hughes's poem's loud announcement of "Three parties / On my party line— / But that third party, / Lord, ain't mine!"—as if the speaker of these lines has become aware of the overhearing, authorial presence of the refrain, imagined as a "third party" eavesdropping on (and repeating) the various conversations of the verses.[128]

This acknowledgement is akin to "loud-talking," the black vernacular vari-

ation of gossip that Abrahams describes as "talking to others . . . loud enough that the person referred to can hear—but when that person reacts, the speaker can reply to the effect, 'Oh, I wasn't talking to you.' "[129] In loud-talking, in other words, gossip carries on in front of the gossipee's face, but as if behind his or her back, as the gossip's remarks, performed *as if* overheard, are in fact meant to be heard. In his first volume of autobiography, *The Big Sea*, Hughes describes a memorable party thrown by Carl Van Vechten that encouraged and formalized the pleasures of loud-talking and its transgression of gossip's typical boundaries between gossiper and gossipee: "Once he gave a gossip party, where everybody was at liberty to go around the room repeating the worst things they could make up or recall about each other to friends on the opposite sides of the room—who were sure to go right over and tell them all about it."[130] We see a version of loud-talking in *Montage*'s gossipy comments, too, whose interjections are not directly addressed to the objects of gossip but might be indirectly intended for their ears, thus again blurring gossip's conventional boundaries.

In "Same in Blues," as in Stein's *Ladies' Voices*, the moment of acknowledged overhearing and its muddying of the line between gossiper and gossipee uses metalepsis (or, to recall Genette's definition, "any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe . . . or the inverse," producing "an effect of strangeness") to bridge narrative worlds ("the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells") that to this point have seemed discrete.[131] Once the diegetic voices of "Same in Blues" display an awareness of an extradiegetic, overhearing presence on their "party line," this authorial presence *enters* the poem's diegesis. The final stanza, sharing the perspective and language ("[t]here's liable to be confusion") of the preceding, italicized refrain, suggests a continuation of the authorial voice—but now formatted, like the verses, in left-justified roman type, as if having crossed the threshold between narrative levels. In the subsequent "Comment on Curb," the more subtle metalepsis of "Same in Blues" is extended by the back and forth between the sequence's diegetic and extradiegetic voices, as the voice of the "Curb"—appropriately another of the poem's gossipy, liminal spaces—confirms the authorial voice's presence in the world from which it initially seemed sealed off by directly addressing it and that world ("[y]ou talk like/they don't kick/dreams around/Downtown"), and the once-distanced authorial voice is now given the intimate markers of personhood, speaking as an "*I*" immediately addressing a present "*you*" ("*I'm talking about/Harlem to you!*"). In a moment exemplary of how Hughes, in

Montage, approaches gossip as a way of archiving the everyday rhythms of postwar Harlem *and* in turn as a mode of poetic self-fashioning, the poem's elusive authorial presence, here, enters the aural keyhole of the party line and emerges as itself a voice, or echo, preserved within the obscurity and "confusion" of gossip's chatter, "*talking about / Harlem*." Ain't you heard?

Queer Gossip

"Langston loved to gossip," Hughes's friend Eulah Pharr recalled. "He wasn't malicious or anything like that, but he just *had* to know who was doing what, and with whom! He didn't let anything pass him that way. Maybe his curiosity had something to do with his writing—but he really enjoyed the hush-hush talk!"[132] In this chapter I have pursued Pharr's tentative insight that Hughes's love of gossip "had something to do with his writing." I have argued that, in *Montage*, Hughes turns to gossip as a way of listening for and archiving the social rhythms of postwar Harlem, particularly as they frustrate standard forms of legibility or attention and as they resist normative ideals of respectability, domesticity, sexuality, nationality, and progress. It is through his poem's gossip about others, I have further contended, that Hughes's own distinctive, if precarious, authorial voice appears—even as the poem calls into question the notion of voice as unequivocal evidence of identity. Far from at odds, these dual aspects of his poetics of gossip—one concentrated on the social, one the individual—are intimately related: throughout the poem, gossipy curiosity and its live social commentary becomes a way of asserting and reimagining poetic voice, one that in turn echoes and preserves the talk of community gossip.

The body of social scientific research on gossip supports this understanding of the voice of gossip as both singular and communal, performed by individuals in everyday scenes of gossip but entailing the appropriation of the stories, and often voices, of gossipees. "In effect," write Jaworski and Coupland, gossipers "remain themselves and become somebody else at the same time," as their echoic voices are neither their own nor, exactly, those of others.[133] Similarly, literary critics such as Susan Stewart have argued that the lyric voice is not singular, despite emanating from an individual: "others . . . are manifested in the voice of the poet as an individual speaking person," whose voice bears the imprint of all those voices that have been impressed upon him or her.[134] For Stewart, the paradigmatic instance of lyric voice belongs to "the ballad singer," who, much like Hughes in *Montage*—a poem rooted, like the ballad, in popular song and vernacular language—"performs

all the parts of a play as if inhabited by the characters, yet within a presentation of physical person that remains constant throughout."[135] Stewart might almost be describing Hughes's performance of the many voices of Harlem and their deferred dreams when she writes, "Of all singers of Western lyric, the ballad singer is the one most radically haunted by others—for he or she presents the gestures, the symptoms, of a range of social actors, and he or she presents those gestures as surviving symptoms of previous actions."[136]

I began by further asserting that, in presenting the repertoire of postwar Harlem's "range of social actors," Hughes's authorial voice—gossipy, lyrical—carries a critical queer resonance. Yet in the intervening pages I have attended primarily to the traces and often obscure spectacle of this poetic voice as it appears in the poem's moments and spaces of gossip, without explicitly dwelling on its queer dimensions. Queerness has, like Hughes's voice in *Montage*, largely occupied obscure, textually marginal spaces of authority (for Hughes, the figurine, figurette, tag, and comments; for me, the footnotes). But it is the queerness of Hughes's gossip and the obscure voice it enables that I want now to return to in conclusion—the ways that, once we acknowledge how "our voices are spoken through," as Stewart writes, "we are bound to hear more than we meant to say."[137]

To construe Hughes's gossip in *Montage* as queer might seem perverse, something more than he intends us to hear, given that the only piece in the poem to use the word "gossip," "Joe Louis," ostensibly presents the activity as a moral failing with potentially invidious effects:

> They worshipped Joe.
> A school teacher
> whose hair was gray
> said:
>
> *Joe has sense enough to know*
> *He is a god.*
> *So many gods don't know.*
>
> "They say" . . . "They say" . . . "They say" . . .
> But the gossips had no
> "They say"
> to latch onto
> for Joe. (70)

Both Harlem's "gossips" and the epistemology of their idle talk come in for disparagement, here. The gossip of "They say" provides a convenient means of "latch[ing] onto" and denigrating the lives of others, recalling Martin Heidegger's account of idle talk, or that "which everyone can snatch up," as "divest[ing] us of the task of genuine understanding."[138] This degraded way of knowing is contrasted with more rigorous and respectable forms of knowledge: the moral lesson of a wise "gray" "school teacher" and the valorized self-knowledge of heavyweight champion boxer and Harlem (indeed American) hero, Joe Louis. Yet by imagining Louis's character as something to be "worshipped" because he has "*sense enough*" to preserve its divine status, beyond the opprobrium of gossip, "Joe Louis" also intimates what has often been seen as a benefit of gossip, its function as an instrument of community standards. If "the gossips" had some juicy news about Louis "to latch onto," the piece implies, his status as a cultural hero might be not only less secure but less warranted.

Neither of these alternatives—gossip as demeaned knowledge, gossip as mechanism of moral policing—is particularly queer. The apparently celebrated *absence* of gossip nonetheless invites us to imagine its presence and queer potential. In a certain sense, gossip isn't even all that absent from the piece, which might be described as gossiping about Joe Louis and the fact that he is above gossip. From this angle, Hughes's ellipses eagerly hold out the possibility of gossip—almost summoning it—before we are told there is none.[139] Meanwhile, Hughes's rhyming of "*know*" and "no" mirrors Louis's self-knowledge with the gossips' lack of it and so asks us to consider the inverse situation, one in which the "*gods don't know*" and the gossips, telling tales out of "school," *do*. This shadow scenario and its alternative, communal way of knowing would upset the relationship of the celebrity object of worship and the Harlem community, giving the most obscure members of the community (recognized only as "They," in contrast to the individuated Louis and "school teacher") a voice and the ability not necessarily or only to enforce norms but also to question and possibly subvert, for better or worse, hierarchies of power and the values that sustain them.

To be sure, gossip's effects in "Joe Louis" are felt primarily through its absence, and the piece leans away from valorizing gossip's queer possibilities. Yet even here we can register the characteristic workings of gossip that we have seen throughout *Montage*. In his study of black speech communities, Abrahams has shown how gossip "provides a running commentary on how individuals adhere to, or depart from, respect ideals" and how, as much

as it can serve to enforce accepted behaviors, it can also work to "propose alternative interpretations of what is meant by behaving respectably and what therefore leads to being accorded respectability by the community."[140] This is the use of gossip that characterizes *Montage*. Such gossip doesn't clarify community norms but rather muddies them; it serves as a means of debating community values and determining what behaviors the group might or might not sanction. Recall how the gossip of "Question" undoes the gender roles of "lady" and "daddy," how that of "Sister" pursues unconventional understandings of sexual relationships and respectability, and how that of "What? So Soon!" places individual choice within nuanced contexts of economic structure. In these sequences, Hughes's gossip portrays one rhythm of daily life disturbed by another, asynchronous rhythm; it tends to arise as a conventional force but becomes the material for a repositioning of community values; and it begins as a communal voice that opens onto the performance of the self. In each instance, gossip in *Montage* undoes normative expectations: about community standards, about the function and effects of gossip itself, and about poetic voice.

Montage advocates for this queer version of gossip—one that seeks out and recirculates the nonnormative material of gossip as a means to an indeterminate but queerer end—in "Live and Let Live," which reads, in its entirety:

> Maybe it ain't right—
> but the people of the night
> will give even
> a snake
> a break. (47)

The attitude of *live and let live* is typically understood as the ethical position of classical liberalism: a tolerance that refrains from judgment. Here, however, the gossipy judgment signaled by "Maybe it ain't right" *enables* rather than damages this ethic. Indeed, the opening gesture, "Maybe it ain't right—/ but," condenses the queer workings of *Montage*'s gossip—which repeatedly introduces what may not be "right" by the standards of conventional morality, only to reappraise its value—into five words. David Chinitz observes how *Montage* generally "exhibits and advocates a broad generosity toward a variety of African American subject positions";[141] I would emphasize that the live and let live stance of "Maybe it ain't right—/ but" specifically echoes and affirms the *queer* ethic of "the people of the night," whose description suggests the alternative worlds and affinities harbored by the obscurity of

darkness and of social marginality. It is not that *Montage*'s commitment to social generosity *extends* to Harlem's queer residents but rather that it *originates* in their worlds and ways of being and knowing.

These queer contours of *Montage*'s gossip are nowhere more evident than in "Cafe: 3 A.M.," the text most often cited—by virtue of its frank references to homosexuality—by critics interested in queer readings of Hughes.[142] More than simply a rare and isolated specimen of Hughes's homosexual content, though, "Cafe: 3 A.M." models a queer voice that reverberates throughout the many sequences in *Montage* that stage the social variety of the Harlem community. John Lowney writes that through the depiction of a "repressive logic of officially defined difference," such as we see in "Cafe: 3 A.M.," *Montage* imagines "young black musicians, interracial couples, illegal drug users, and homosexual men and women"—an "implied alliance of social outcasts"—as "occupy[ing] a threatening social space made common simply by the shared experience of official repression."[143] Within this community of those relegated to social obscurity by racial difference, class marginality, queer sexuality, or gender nonconformity, queer figures of color, in particular, embody the obscure spectacle of complex intersections presumed to be discrete or transparent, exemplifying the variousness of black American culture and the many ways it has been perceived, as Roderick Ferguson argues, as "eccentric to the normative."[144] Hughes draws on the queer energies of these obscure "people of the night" in his efforts to listen for, give voice to, and archive the nonnormative experience and feeling of a postwar Harlem estranged from the American dream.

Like "Live and Let Live," "Cafe: 3 A.M." appears in the nightlife section of *Montage*, entitled "Early Bright," and it, too, turns to "the people of the night," here located in an afterhours club being surveilled by the "vice squad," as avatars of a queer practice of gossip:

> Detectives from the vice squad
> with weary sadistic eyes
> spotting fairies.
>
> *Degenerates*,
> some folks say.
>
> But God, Nature,
> or somebody
> made them that way.

Police lady or Lesbian
over there?

Where? (48)

This piece juxtaposes the punishing, institutional gaze of "the vice squad" to gossip's alternative way of knowing and comes down clearly on the side of gossip, casting McCarthy-era police surveillance and the routine raids of gay bars and harassment and arrest of their clientele (for violating laws against activities such as same-sex dancing or cross-dressing) as the "sadistic" practice that it was.[145] Community gossip, or what "some folks say," can be an equally menacing form of othering that would pathologize gay men, or "fairies," as "[*d*]*egenerates*." However, "[*d*]*egenerates*,/ some folks say.// But" presents another instance of the signature gesture of *Montage*'s gossip ("[m]aybe it ain't right—/ but"), and here gossip fosters a reconsideration of queer gender presentation and sexuality, one that recasts deviance as difference. Rhyme accentuates how gossip's echo finds new, contradictory possibilities in previous voices and attitudes, as the pathologizing import of what "some folks say" becomes a recognition of a queer "way" of being in the world, and as forms of knowledge that seek to fasten individuals' identities in place (a secure "there") are displaced by more obscure ways of knowing and being ("*Where?*").

These final questions unsettle the first stanza's clear delineation between "[d]etectives" and "fairies" and blur the identities of "[p]olice lady" and "[l]esbian"; in so doing they retroactively charge the label "[*d*]*egenerates*" with an ambiguity as to whether it is meant to apply to the police or to the afterhours café's queer denizens. This inversion of the initial gaze and its Lavender Scare power dynamic—"a McCarthy-era paranoid scene, infiltrated by an 'enemy in our midst,' where the lines of demarcation are smeared," as John Shoptaw describes it—has usually led critics to read the piece's general affect as paranoid or anxious.[146] If I listen closely, though, what I hear in the final "*Where?*" and its transformation of "sadistic" surveillance into gossipy possibility sounds as much to me like queer pleasure. Who speaks this question? As with so many of *Montage*'s voices, it is difficult to say, but presumably this is not the voice of the police, whom we might expect to recognize a fellow member of the "vice squad" nor, though it is more possible, the voice of one of the café's fairies or lesbians, whom we might expect to recognize a fellow queer. Instead, the query "*Where?*" most recalls the obscure voices of the tags, figurines, and comments that punctuate so many of *Mon-*

tage's sequences and indicate the gossipy perspective of an authorial "third party" whose presence within the world of the gossip it communicates remains indeterminate. I suggest that part of what we hear, here, is Hughes's precarious poetic voice in "a transient moment of identity construction or appropriation," as it echoes the perspective of the queer figures that are this piece's gossipees, figures who are, as Jaworski and Coupland argue of the objects of gossip, "simultaneously despised and revered"—"deprived of status and authority" by objectifying and othering gossip "but also accorded a sacred power, knowledge, or qualities. In other words," they conclude, "the gossipee may be everything that the others are not but may desire to be."[147]

By constructing his authorial voice out of the gossip about and by Harlem's queer "people of the night," Hughes, as we have seen, imagines his way into that world, preserving not only its dissonant rhythms but his own identification with them. The obscurity of Hughes's poetic presence, that is—an obscurity that exploits and challenges contemporary lyric reading's assumptions about the transparent universality of voice—is a queer obscurity. Where do we locate queerness in *Montage*? Where do we locate the voice of Hughes? And what is at stake in posing such questions, which at best seek to make legible what historically has been occluded and at worst threaten to fix a defiantly obscure presence in the limiting, normative narrative of what "some folks say"? These are critical questions anticipated by *Montage* itself and posed, if significantly not answered, by "Cafe: 3 A.M." and the "*Where?*" that emanates from an unidentified speaker who casts about an eager gaze. This gaze and its accompanying query, anything but "weary" or "sadistic," look toward a desired but uncertain end, delighting in the fleeting spectacle of obscurity in which queer possibilities flourish.

3 "The Dish That's Art"

Frank O'Hara's Self-Gossip

I claim them all for my insufferable
genius my demon my dish

Frank O'Hara, "A Proud Poem"

"Deep Gossip"

Fondly remembered as "a terrible (also first-rate) gossip," Frank O'Hara has seemed to many a poet whose work—talky, bursting with intimate references, peopled with celebrated and obscure proper names and knowingly indeterminate pronouns—is itself "all gossip, local gossip, social gossip."[1] Just as in friendship he "savored gossip and playful malice," in his poems O'Hara remains always attuned to, as he writes, "a little supper-club conversation for the mill of the gods."[2] "What really makes me happy," he claimed of his verse, "is when something just falls into place as if it were a conversation or something," and throughout his conversational poetry he evinces a particular fascination with the stylistic possibilities of gossip.[3] In a memoir he recalls himself and his circle of fellow poets splitting their time during the postwar halcyon days of American painting "between the literary bar, the San Remo, and the artists' bar, the Cedar Tavern. In the San Remo we argued and gossiped: in the Cedar we often wrote poems while listening to the painters argue and gossip."[4] Not surprisingly, in these poems gossiping, listening to gossip, and writing poetry intoxicatingly bleed one into the other. "[Y]ou must/work," O'Hara quietly asserts to himself in one poem, "to make succulent the dish that's art," whereupon a voice much like a boisterous party guest barges into the poem to ask: "Are you dishing art?" (*CP* 75). O'Hara experienced these two voices and their seemingly unique demands—for gossip and poetry, "dishing art" and "the dish that's art"—as

vitally co-constitutive, each productive of a crucial part of his work and each able to feed the muse he called, not without ambivalence, "my insufferable/ genius my demon my dish" (*CP* 52).

Yet how, why, and to what effect does O'Hara's dish become poetry and his poetry become dish? Marking out the extremes of the response to his gossipy poetics, Allen Ginsberg's oft-quoted elegy for O'Hara hails him as a "[c]hatty prophet" with "a common ear/for our deep gossip," while in her review of *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, Pearl K. Bell unhappily wades through "huge trash-heaps" of "poems, full of campy gossip."[5] These two takes suggest that encountering O'Hara's poetry entails finding oneself up to one's neck in gossip but still uncertain just how "deep" it is. And, indeed, considering the extent to which O'Hara's champions and detractors alike have understood gossip to play a central role in his personality and poetic practice, we know relatively little about the contours of this role and its historical, theoretical, and especially formal concerns and implications. In her pioneering study of O'Hara, for instance, Marjorie Perloff clears the ground for a rigorous analysis of the poetry by first sweeping away the seeming distractions of gossip. She contends that in the aftermath of O'Hara's bizarre, early death—struck by a dune buggy on a Fire Island beach in 1966—the artist "became a work of art, and attention was deflected from O'Hara's real achievement, which was his poetry."[6] Quoting in her final chapter the closing lines of Ginsberg's elegy, she concludes, "This is essentially the mythologized version of the poet . . . the 'gay' (in both senses of the word) . . . celebrant of New York and purveyor of 'deep gossip' "—thus consigning O'Hara's queer gossip, and our own, to the diversions of the O'Hara myth (185). When Perloff herself turns to O'Hara's "intimate talk," she accordingly proceeds as if carefully letting the hot air out of his brilliantly chatty balloon: noting the poems' frequent sense of an "ongoing conversation," she is quick to assure us that "this is not to say, as critics often have, that an O'Hara poem is *just* good casual talk," and in her reading of "Rhapsody" the poem succeeds "*despite* its air of casual talk" (26, 27, 29, emphases mine). "Interest in the legend—our inveterate love of gossip—has deflected attention from the poet's accomplishment," Perloff insists, and she is, of course, partly right—perhaps as much now, with O'Hara's star in ascendance, as when these words first appeared four decades ago (6). But "our inveterate love of gossip" is also precisely what O'Hara's poetry itself—often at its most accomplished—so brazenly appeals to, making it a love whose insights are difficult to do without.

To be sure, gossip has made revealing cameo appearances in significant assessments of O'Hara's "queer talk" and his conversational poetics more generally,[7] and any account of his engagement with idle talk has much to learn from important studies of the social formations of postwar American poetry, many of which feature O'Hara as they treat aspects of sociality closely related to gossip, including community, coterie, and friendship.[8] Yet—as in the case of Stein—the "playful malice" of gossip's talk *about* others cannot be subsumed neatly into broader considerations of O'Hara's conversation (in dialogue *with* others) or the communities these conversational practices are often seen as sustaining. At the same time, the term "gossip"—in suggesting an identity that gathers, interprets, invents, and circulates private and typically unverified information about others; in designating this unconfirmed material itself; and in indicating (as a verb) the performance by which this information is disclosed—provides us the conceptual ability to move fluidly among the actors, content, and style that continually work in concert to form, deform, and reform communities and the selves of which they are composed. An explicit focus on O'Hara's gossip therefore both usefully brings out the imperative, queer interrelation of varied critical emphases on talk, sexuality, the social, and the poetic and offers a rhetoric whose formal specificity holds out the promise of more nuanced examination of how such multifaceted dish actually shapes and takes shape within individual poems.

As soon as one begins to sound the largely unexplored depths of O'Hara's "deep gossip," one discovers that although O'Hara is widely viewed as American poetry's paradigmatic instance of the poet as gossip, his poems' dish confounds many of gossip's most basic paradigms. This breaking of the rules of gossip might be seen as—and no doubt in part is—the result of its adaptation to literature, in which form it becomes, Patricia Meyer Spacks claims, "no longer true gossip, only a simulacrum."[9] To understand gossip in literature in this way would be to make of it what Barbara Herrnstein Smith calls a fictive representation of natural discourse. Smith's influential 1976 account of literary works as fictional imitations of real-world speech acts theorizes and extends what Jonathan Culler describes as "the critical operation by which Anglo-American New Criticism, after the 1940s, takes the poem away from the historical author and treats it as the *speech* of a persona," or speaker, whose situation and motives it is the reader's task to construct from the poem.[10] As Smith writes, "Although the poem is a fictive utterance without a particular historical context, its characteristic effect is . . . to in-

vite and enable the reader to create a plausible context for it."[11] But contrary to this still-dominant model for interpreting poems, O'Hara's lyric gossip, I ultimately argue, does not so much gesture toward "a plausible context" one must "create" for it as constitute its own often rather *implausible* context—neither lyric nor gossip, exactly, yet deeply engaged with both as it attempts to glimpse the queer selves and social arrangements possible beyond the apparent horizons of each genre.

In attending to this implausible context and the possibilities of its bad form, this chapter revolves around the foremost ways O'Hara's lyric gossip, already a transgression of his era's New Critical lyric precepts and what he calls the "awful lot of dicta laid down by everybody about what was good and what was bad" in modernist poetry, also and more unexpectedly deviates from established notions of good gossip.[12] Indeed gossip, for O'Hara, is not always good: as we will see, its pleasures and powers in his work carry the residue of its negative affect and in fact may depend on that bad feeling's never being wholly transfigured. And, although unmistakably gossipy, O'Hara's poetry often complicates gossip's staging, whether by talking (as with Hughes's "loud-talking" in *Montage*) about the scenario's typically absent others not behind their backs but in front of their faces, or by upsetting even the most fundamental definition of gossip as talk to and about other people by dishing to and about O'Hara himself. This self-gossip, like the "self-talk" Erving Goffman describes as "a kind of perversion, a form of linguistic self-abuse," becomes for O'Hara a queer means of poetic self-fashioning whose gossip presents an alternative to the idea of confession that, especially in relation to changing conceptions of privacy, subjectivity, sexuality, and style, has dominated understandings of disclosure in midcentury poetry.[13] Beginning with his first poetic experiments with gossip in the early 1950s, in what follows I show how O'Hara's lyric gossip seeks not an ideal of disclosure by which one uncovers and inhabits the authorized truth of one's subjectivity but, rather, in a Cold War climate notoriously hostile to queerness, pursues within the intimately cultivated failures of lyric poetry and gossip an imagined space for the real emergence of improper names, unauthorized selves.

Improper Names

"We'll open with a question. Is style hearsay?"[14] With this query the painter Joan Mitchell commenced an April 1958 panel on hearsay at the Club, a New York artists' gathering for discussion, debate, and a fair amount

of gossip about avant-garde art and poetry. Let's open with this question, too, since it is one O'Hara poses and inspires throughout a body of work whose reception has been indelibly marked by "our inveterate love of gossip," and since the dialogue's collaborative script—assembled by Elaine de Kooning "after three evenings of private discussion" among herself and panel members Norman Bluhm, Mike Goldberg, Mitchell, and O'Hara; subsequently "tampered with by Frank O'Hara"; and eventually published as "5 Participants in a Hearsay Panel"—provides one instance of O'Hara's and his cohort's unorthodox thinking about gossip. Is style hearsay? The panel posits a number of possible answers, the following among them:

> NORMAN: Frank says: Style at its lowest ebb is method. Style at its highest ebb is personality. (149)
>
> FRANK: Elaine says Pavia says Dogs don't mind being dogs. The panel has heard—hasn't it, Joan—that certain galleries have dropped all their artists and are looking for promising new talent. (150)
>
> FRANK: Someone in the know says more women artists keep journals than men do. (151)
>
> MIKE: Frank says Elaine says Norman is being stuffy again. (151)

Thus satirically assuming and celebrating gossip's rhetoric, the dialogue proceeds as if purposefully inverting the initial inquiry so that the question at hand ("Is style hearsay?") becomes as well, *Is hearsay a style?*

If to ask the former question is to broach an interpretive problem having to do with the seemingly distracting role played by gossip in aesthetic judgment, especially amid the noise of the marketplace and its often disavowed influence, to respond to the latter question, a more immediately formal one, is to suggest that art, criticism, and gossip are impossibly and productively intertwined. Nearly all of the panel's prepared remarks *on* hearsay, parsed out (an authorial note informs us) "with careful attention to misattribution and misquotation" (149), are tagged *as* hearsay, from the relatively straightforward dish of "Norman says," "Harold Rosenberg says," "Fairfield says," or "Someone in the know says" (150, 151), to more elaborate chains of talk whose genealogies rival the actual news they spread in gossipy significance, such as "Philip Guston told Andrew Wyeth that Louis B. Mayer told John Huston," or "Ernestine Lassaw told Franz Kline and Tom Young that Bob Rauschenberg told her that Joseph Cornell saw a beautiful girl in a box, a

cashier's box, outside a movie house . . ." (149, 151).[15] In this way, the dialogue's dense thicket of speech tags and proper names presents the aesthetic as inevitably mediated by the social, but it also troubles any easy distinction between the two by tacitly asserting that hearsay is an available style—one that itself often circulates as the stuff of art world hearsay.

As the first of Mitchell's fellow panelists to respond to her question, O'Hara sets the discussion's tone of inversion and paradox with a reply that helps to illuminate more specifically his own poetics of gossip: "Well Pavia says," O'Hara says, referring to Philip Pavia, sculptor and founding member of the Club, "nowadays everyone talks about you behind your back in front of your face" (149).[16] In this opening gambit's bit of meta-gossip, O'Hara theatrically exemplifies the self-contradictory quip he voices by talking about Pavia, and indeed "everyone" in New York's vanguard circle of artists, many of whom were in the audience during the panel, in front of their faces but as if behind their backs. Strictly speaking this is not gossip, for which the "main moral norm," according to Max Gluckman, "is that you must scandalize about an opponent behind his back," and which "always," as Spacks writes, "involves talk about one or more *absent* figures."[17] In this case the others taken as objects of talk are present (and, in the rambunctious atmosphere of the Club, might well be expected to respond). Nonetheless, this witticism and its enactment provocatively propose that gossip depends not on a necessary framework for communication but instead on a manner one might deploy in various frameworks, an attitude one might strike toward others and the social norms that govern our relationships with others. Studies of gossip have emphasized how the *just between us* intimacy of its shared exclusions facilitates group cohesion and defines community membership by establishing who is out of the loop and so who is in it.[18] But the impossible spatial metaphor of talking "behind your back in front of your face" positions both those being talked about and those doing the talking—both gossipees and gossips—in a liminal space, simultaneously inside and outside the circle of gossip and its community norms. Gossip, in this formulation, might be understood as a style of talk (*as if* "behind your back") whose breach of decorum (*in fact* "in front of your face") wants to reimagine and transform more than consolidate the given arrangements of inhabited spaces ranging from a panel to a party to a poem.

The idea of gossip as a transformative style is suggestive of what I take to be the queer poetics of O'Hara's lyric gossip, which, in adopting the rhetoric of dish, makes strange the familiar surroundings of the lyric poem. Indeed,

being talked about "behind your back in front of your face" aptly describes the experience of O'Hara's poetry and the compendium of proper names and personal references that, at once inviting and opaque, can make even O'Hara's most immediate readers feel both addressed by and absented from the poems, talked to and talked about, approached as an intimate and a stranger. One of O'Hara's lovers, the dancer Vincent Warren, captures this effect when he writes, "The poems are full of personal references that mean so much to me—and maybe nothing to strangers—but there are *many* references in the earlier poems that I don't get, except the intimacy of Frank's feelings about whatever he's referring to—so I guess the 'strangers' who read the love poems too, get what Frank's talking about."[19] This uncertain relational dynamic of intimacy and strangeness, getting it and not getting it, mirrors the way O'Hara himself, though everywhere designated, is seldom properly in or out of his poems or the world they describe—a strategy of aesthetic self-making that recalls the gossip's self-assertion by self-effacement (*but you didn't hear it from me*).

These issues—style and hearsay, poetry and dish, intimacy and strangeness, self-assertion and self-effacement—converge in a formative instance of O'Hara's poetic gossip, the 1951 poem "A Party Full of Friends." Among the first of O'Hara's many poems to feature prominently the names of friends, "A Party Full of Friends" commemorates in gossip "a party," as Mark Ford relates, "that [John] Ashbery hosted in his furnished room on West Twelfth Street while O'Hara was staying with him during a Christmas break from Ann Arbor in 1950."[20] O'Hara begins by plunging into the revelry:

> Violet leaped to the piano
> stool and knees drawn up
> under her chin commenced to
> spin faster and faster sing-
> ing "I'm a little Dutch boy
> Dutch boy Dutch boy" until
> the rain very nearly fell
> through the roof![21]

Each of the poem's six subsequent stanzas similarly accumulates partygoers, breathlessly relating, for example, how "Jane . . . advanced slowly" from across the room while "Hal" and "Jack" discussed Violet's and Jane's antics; how "Larry paced the floor" as "Arnie . . . muttered"; how "John yawked / onto

the ottoman" and "George thought / Freddy was old enough / to drink"; and how "Gloria had not been / invited, although she had / brought a guest" (*PR* 24–25).

As this précis suggests, "A Party Full of Friends" is most immediately a poem full of names. How are we to understand them?[22] For Charles Altieri, such more or less unknown proper names have the effect of alienation: O'Hara's "texture of proper names gives each person and detail an identity, but in no way do the names help the reader understand anything about what has been named. To know . . . a person O'Hara expects to meet is named Norman is rather a reminder for the reader that the specific details of another's life can appear only as momentary fragments, insisting through their particularity on his alienation from any inner reality they might possess."[23] Citing Altieri, Perloff similarly asserts that "persons and places, books and films are named because they are central to O'Hara's particular consciousness"; these names gesture toward an inaccessible world of experience, not the lyric transcendence of "mythologizing portraits" (130–131). Yet Ford sees the proper names of "A Party Full of Friends" as just such transcendent efforts, "initiating what one might call O'Hara's mythopoeic gossip mode."[24] And Geoff Ward claims that, rather than "insisting" on "alienation," O'Hara's references to friends' proper names tend to serve (for a certain kind of reader, at least) as points of identification: discussing "Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul," he contends, "Any of us middle-class speaking subjects has a friend like Kenneth and a lunch appointment next week with our own Joan or Jean-Paul."[25]

Do O'Hara's unknown proper names signal our exclusion from the world the poems represent, or do they transcend their particularity to become a point of abstract identification? And how could these names' particularity either designate a reality from which we are barred or, quite the opposite, form an invitation to a party full of mythologized friends we recognize as surrogates for our own? Rather than simply choosing one reading or the other, Lytle Shaw argues that O'Hara's use of proper names is best understood as part of a fluid rhetoric that productively negotiates between the poems' vital, empirical contexts and their anticipated textual afterlives. Shaw's focus on how these contexts "come into awkward and revealing contact" better accounts for the coincident intimacy and strangeness I find central to O'Hara's lyric gossip.[26] O'Hara's 1953 poem "Round Robin," for example, makes the awkwardness of negotiating empirical and textual contexts, inti-

macy and strangeness, part of its very structure, drolly annotating its personal pronouns and the gossipy rhetoric of *you know who* with a series of footnotes that provide the uninitiated with the referents' proper names:

> And there's the other[3] so like and unlike him
> who is moved by my smile like a public accusation
> of homosexuality against the Great Wall of China;
>
> to him my affection's as pleasing as an insult
> to a nun. And he's not very jealous of the legendary beauty[4]
> who has launched a thousand of my eyes,
>
> for as I race away from her like a smoky train
> she assigns me to the brunette[5] with a cold. (*CP* 139)

O'Hara's footnotes for these stanzas refer us to the bottom of the page, where we find "[3]Larry Rivers [4]Helen Parker [5]Jane Freilicher" (*CP* 139), names that fill in the intimate pronouns' blanks for those not in-the-know enough to understand who is being spoken of—a key to the poem's gossip addressed to those readers outside of its intimate circle. The footnotes, that is, inscribe within the poem a temporally and affectively distant addressee along with its contemporary, intimate one; a distinctly textual reception context in addition to a fictively oral one; and a public address simultaneous with its private one. Any effort to recover or privilege the poem's seemingly original context discovers that we are already figured as part of that context, part of its "round robin"—as if the poem's gossip not only anticipates readers beyond its coterie audience but stakes its felicity on both securing *and* estranging the attention of such readers. For although the poem's footnotes seem addressed to distanced readers, they are also directed toward its immediate addressee, who presumably would understand the poem's gossip without the footnotes and so view them more as knowingly marking group boundaries. In fact, the footnotes are of little interpretive help anyway and in this sense more of a tease: only a reader very familiar with O'Hara's circle would recognize the majority of the names they provide, and even that reader is unlikely to understand the relationships between them. Footnotes require footnotes, gossip generates gossip, as the poem both shores up its circle and yet continues to extend its frames of reception outward.

"A Party Full of Friends" similarly explores the "awkward and revealing contact" between gossip's naming names and poetic naming, presenting another significant, early experiment with what happens when a circle of friends

becomes a poem of names. This question of the relation between the social and the poetic is brought to the fore when, following Larry's boastful lament that "when I'm not paint/ing I'm writing and when I'm/not writing I'm suffering/for my kids I'm good at all three" (*PR* 24–25), O'Hara responds:

> indeed you are, I
> added hastily with real ad-
> miration before anyone else
> could get into the poem, but
> Arnie, damn him! had already
> muttered "yes you are" not
> understanding the fun of
> idle protest. (*PR* 25)

The stanza's narrative of earnest Arnie stepping on O'Hara's ironic retort simultaneously introduces and strikingly blurs the boundary between the poem and the experience it represents. Conspicuous line breaks, like "ad-/miration," formally accentuate this contested border between what's in and outside of the crowded poem, and O'Hara's attempt to prevent "anyone else" from entering "into the poem" enacts a form of metalepsis, the narrative figure we have already seen at work in Stein's and Hughes's lyric gossip. Gérard Genette, recall, defines metalepsis as "any intrusion" of the "narrator or narratee" into the narrative's world, "or the inverse," thus producing "an effect of strangeness."[27] Specifically, these lines present an instance of what Genette terms author's metalepsis, "which consists of pretending that the poet 'himself brings about the effects he celebrates' "—although here, O'Hara seemingly *fails* to bring about his intended effect of guarding entry "into the poem" ("Arnie, damn him!"), such that his metalepsis comically connotes not the poet's agency but the threat posed to it by his gossipees, whose stories are and are not his own.[28] This moment consequently presses what Genette calls metalepsis's "unacceptable and insistent hypothesis . . . that the narrator and his narratees—you and I—perhaps belong to some narrative."[29]

Once the poem's narrative levels have been brought intrusively together, the textual relationship among O'Hara, the friends who are the objects of his poem's gossip, and the reader becomes increasingly destabilized. In this sense, metalepsis's transgression of the border between those doing the talking and those being talked about suggests another way in which O'Hara's poetic gossip chats "behind your back in front of your face," using style to transform the relations of a given space. O'Hara seems to have enjoyed

flirting with metaleptic effects: numerous anecdotes recall his habit of composing poems in the midst of, and about, everyday social occasions, as if bringing back stage talk front stage to dish on an ongoing experience. Kenneth Koch recollects, "One of the most startling things about Frank in the period when I first knew him was his ability to write a poem when other people were talking, or even to get up in the middle of a conversation, get his typewriter, and write a poem, sometimes participating in the conversation while doing so."[30] James Schuyler similarly remembers "having coffee with Frank and Joe LeSueur . . . and Joe and I began to twit him about his ability to write a poem any time, any place. Frank gave us a look—both hot and cold—got up, went into his bedroom and wrote 'Sleeping on the Wing,' a beauty, in a matter of minutes."[31] And Joe Brainard writes, "I remember seeing Frank O'Hara write a poem once. We were watching a western on T.V. and he got up as tho to answer the telephone or to get a drink but instead he went over to the typewriter, leaned over it a bit, and typed for four or five minutes standing up. Then he pulled the piece of paper out of the typewriter and handed it to me to read. Then he lay back down to watch more T.V."[32]

Such accounts, while no doubt part of the O'Hara myth, usefully dramatize the way his poetic gossip improbably occupies everyday social spaces, making their familiar experiences strange—as if any moment could be revealed to belong to some poem. Even when O'Hara's poems have not literally been written simultaneously with their occasions and the doings of those involved, their ambiguous shaping of temporality often frames them as if this were the case. A well-known paratextual instance of such framing occurs in the humorous, self-authored jacket copy for O'Hara's *Lunch Poems*, a blurb which begins, "Often this poet, strolling through the noisy splintered glare of a Manhattan noon, has paused at a sample Olivetti to type up thirty or forty lines of ruminations. . . ."[33] At first blush, the effort to effect the sense that occasion and poem correspond exactly might seem a continuance of a particularly American poetic desire to close the gap between experience and verse, a desire given voice, for instance, in Walt Whitman's 1855 preface to *Leaves of Grass*, where he claims of the American people's "manners speech dress friendships" that "these too are unrhymed poetry."[34] Yet if O'Hara wants to merge everyday experience and poetry, or to perpetuate the illusion of such a merging, he certainly does not succeed, since what often proves notable in the poems, as in the above anecdotes of O'Hara's composition of them, is not the seamless fusing of the everyday and the poetic but rather their conspicuous and "startling" encounter.

The metalepsis of "A Party Full of Friends" stages this odd encounter. Figuring "the poem," like the "party," as a space one might "get into" or be kept out of, O'Hara imagines too that friends, poet, and reader might variously move between these spaces, their characteristic styles, and their different ontological statuses. Does Arnie's muttering occur in the poem or the party? Which space does O'Hara's hasty interjection occupy? Can Arnie cross as a name "into the poem" through his presence at the party? Has Gloria "not been invited" to the party or the poem? Can the reader—a bit like the "guest" of an uninvited guest—gain entrance to the party by means of the poem's surrogate names? Very little seems certain, as O'Hara's metalepsis both draws attention to and fantastically erases the border between these two worlds—between, as Genette writes, "the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells"—in spatial but also temporal terms.[35] The poem's gossipy, past-tense account initially sets the party, expectedly, in a temporality prior to the poem's narration of it, but this straightforward temporal relation is hopelessly muddied once O'Hara presents Arnie, in the party's temporality, as beating him into the poem ("Arnie, damn him! had already/muttered 'yes you are'"), even as in the poem he beats Arnie to the punch ("indeed you are, I/added hastily . . . before anyone else/could get into the poem"). This contradictory distinction between the time of the poem and (as it were) party time suggests that these lines depict O'Hara anticipating during the party the future writing of the poem, or, more exactly, recalling while writing the poem his past anticipation of this future moment. Hence during the party O'Hara is already in the poem, but during the writing of the poem he is back at the party, ensuring that he—like the reader—is never fully within nor without either world.

Given O'Hara's lightness of tone in "A Party Full of Friends," we might downplay these strange and dizzying effects as simply so many spatial and temporal pranks on the reader. Yet something more seems at stake when the poem concludes by laying claim to the resulting disorder as a means of poetic self-fashioning, exclaiming in the first lines of the final stanza, in another marked instance of author's metalepsis:

> What
> confusion! and to think
> I sat down and caused it
> all! (*PR* 25)

The sense that these lines' ambiguous "it" could refer to either the "confusion" of the represented party or that of the poem that represents it is only heightened by their echo of O'Hara's slightly earlier poem "Autobiographia Literaria," a more obvious if no less ironic example of ars poetica, which concludes:

> And here I am, the
> center of all beauty!
> writing these poems!
> Imagine! (*CP* 11)

Taken together, these passages suggest the affinity in O'Hara's work between the "center of all beauty" and the center of "confusion," a stance similarly expressed in his 1955 poem "My Heart," which invokes the reader as an "aficionado of my mess" (*CP* 231). "A Party Full of Friends" locates poetic identity within a beautiful "mess" and "confusion" that is not only that of the exuberant party or giddy poem but also and even primarily that *between* party and poem, experience and representation—the boundary O'Hara's metalepses have both performed and distorted. In this sense the final stanza's metalepsis, in "pretending that the poet 'himself brings about the effects he celebrates' " ("I sat down and caused it"), peculiarly pretends to bring about the transgressive effect of metalepsis itself, celebrating *it* as constitutive of his poetic self.

As O'Hara traverses the line between the world of the party and the world of the poem, and so fails to inhabit properly either one, he imagines out of this failure a threshold space between the two, one whose "confusion" culminates, in the poem's final lines, in the emergence of the poet's own proper name. Consider the complete closing stanza:

> What
> confusion! and to think
> I sat down and caused it
> all! No! Lyon wanted some
> one to give a birthday
> party and Bubsy was born
> within the fortnight the
> only one everybody loves. I
> don't care. Someone's going
> to stay until the cows

come home. Or my name isn't

Frank O'Hara (*PR* 25)

In one sense, the poem's gossipy network of names—Violet, Jane, Hal, Jack, Larry, Arnie, John, George, Freddy, Gloria, Lyon, and Bubsy—here finds closure in the one full name that has "caused it/all" and whose authority unifies the poem's represented experience: "Frank O'Hara." Yet, as soon as O'Hara asserts that he has "caused it/all," he negates this claim ("No!"), allowing that the party (and hence the poem) might have been "caused" in part by Lyon, who "wanted some/one to give a birthday/party," and Bubsy, whose birth date presents a convenient excuse for it. This gesture recalls O'Hara's previous claim to have kept others out of the poem and the subsequent admission that they have already made their way in, forming a pattern of self-assertion and self-effacement that makes the final lines' *my name is my word* guarantee—"[o]r my name isn't// Frank O'Hara"—anything but certain, and perhaps recommends the opposing interpretation. Rather than a poem progressing toward the constitution of the poet's authoritative name and its implied subjectivity, that is, we might also grasp the poem's organizing subjectivity as gradually deconstituted, moving toward the anonymity of free-floating gossip *and* the abstractions of the lyric voice, unveiled as a textual figure in a poem functioning independently of any subjectivity an authorial proper name might imply. In short, these complex concluding lines fail to resolve the ongoing tension between party and poem: neither constitutive nor deconstitutive of a social or textual self, exactly, they are instead smartly aware of themselves as, and as needing to be, both. If O'Hara were to appear conclusively within the poem, it could only be as an abstract illusion of his presence, one that may enable more inclusive, mediated encounters with anonymous others, but at the expense of the vital particularities of social context and embodiment that that illusion to some degree necessarily abstracts itself from. O'Hara's inability to choose between social experience and the poetic, or gossip and lyric, thus suspends conventional notions of authority and autonomy that have shored up the modern lyric self, but in so doing it makes space for messier, more provisional forms of agency and sociality.

O'Hara accentuates this double movement between the norms of gossip and lyric—and toward a voice somehow particular *and* anonymous—by placing the status of the proper name in necessary relation to the indefinite pronoun "someone": "Someone's going/to stay until the cows/come home. Or my name isn't// Frank O'Hara." Most considerations of O'Hara's use of

proper names have treated these names in isolation or only in relation to other types of proper names (exploring, for instance, the canonizing effect of setting unknown names of friends next to the celebrated names of literary forebears or Hollywood stars, or examining the way O'Hara's gatherings of names imagine alternative kinship structures).[36] But O'Hara's names are often mirrored by indefinite pronouns, and the recognition of this formative relationship between the particular and the anonymous significantly provides, in a number of poems, a form of poetic closure. In O'Hara's 1955 poem "At the Old Place," for example, the presence of a nameless "Someone" facilitates the closing scene of camp, queer acknowledgment among the poem's proper names:

> Jack, Earl and Someone drift
> guiltily in. "I knew they were gay
> the minute I laid eyes on them!" screams John.
> How ashamed they are of us! we hope. (*CP* 224)

This camp mix of intimate acquaintances and strange someones becomes uncanny in O'Hara's well-known 1959 elegy for Billie Holiday, "The Day Lady Died," as the poet's idiosyncratic maneuvering among the proper names "Miss Stillwagon," "Verlaine," "Patsy," "Bonnard," "Hesiod," "Richard Lattimore," "Brendan Behan," "Genet," and "Mike" gives way to a memory, both personal and impersonal, O'Hara's own and everyone's, in which the self is formed and lost:

> and I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of
> leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT
> while she whispered a song along the keyboard
> to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing (*CP* 325)

Finally, another celebrated poem from 1959, "Personal Poem," concludes by focusing on an unnamed "one person" who mediates O'Hara and LeRoi's, and the poem's, valedictory moment:

> I wonder if one person out of the 8,000,000 is
> thinking of me as I shake hands with LeRoi
> and buy a strap for my wristwatch and go
> back to work happy at the thought possibly so (*CP* 336)

Here, the ambiguous "one person out of the 8,000,000" is itself both as particular as can be (one *specific* person among the multitudes?) and wildly

general (*any* "one person" in New York?), just as in "At the Old Place" the anonymous moniker "Someone" functions as a kind of proper name. Such slippage between the anonymous and particular is inherent in the very definition of the term "someone," which can refer to an indefinite, unknown, or unspecified person (and so a no one), or a person of importance or authority (a real someone). At risk of flattening their distinctive uses of the indefinite pronouns "someone," "everyone," and "one," we might understand each of these poems to close, like "A Party Full of Friends," with a self on the verge of becoming a particular someone or—or rather *and*—an anonymous no one.

"Someone's going/to stay until the cows/come home. Or my name isn't// Frank O'Hara": in an obituary for O'Hara, Peter Schjeldahl writes that "the painter Helen Frankenthaler says personal invitations to parties in the '50s often carried the information 'Frank will be there'—the ultimate inducement to attend."[37] These closing lines of "A Party Full of Friends" suggest a similar inducement, yet also reflect the uncertain presence and agency of the poet, who has been the indefinite "anyone" attempting to get a word into the poem before "anyone else" and the "some/one" who gives the party "Lyon wanted," and whose "name" now, as before, depends on someone's continued presence. Employing the present tense, these final lines recall the poem's previous instances of reported speech from the party. Yet free of quotation marks—like the indirect discourse of O'Hara's earlier statement, "indeed you are," ambiguously situated between the world of the party and the world of the poem—their tense implies a lyric present. Read as the former, O'Hara insists "Someone's going/to stay" at the party; as the latter, he declares that someone—some reader—will stay within the poem. Since we can neither conclusively choose between nor reconcile these alternatives, where are we to locate "Frank O'Hara," whose proper "name" (or its loss) therefore depends on its relation to both an intimate and a stranger?

O'Hara worries about the uncertain effects on selfhood and friendship of such straddling of the spaces of the social and poetic in his 1950 poem "A Letter to Bunny" (addressed to V. R. Lang, the Violet of "A Party Full of Friends"): "When anyone reads this but you it begins/to be lost," O'Hara writes, not without excitement. "My voice is sucked into a thousand/ears and I don't know whether I'm weakened" (*CP* 23). Encouraging O'Hara to try to publish "A Party Full of Friends," Ashbery frames the loss in moving between the spaces of party and poem as more certainly productive, affirmatively suggesting the queer intimacy of a party full of strangers: "The fact that no one would know who the people are would add rather than

decrease charm."[38] Designating a voice at once lost and found as it pursues intimacy *and* publicity, one ear and "a thousand," the "name" that invites us to and excludes us from "A Party Full of Friends" can only be an improper one. Its formal transgressions ensure it is fully present within neither the party nor poem, gossip nor lyric, but instead an intervening space, one the poet's lyric gossip can imagine and foster if never authorize or confirm—a space in which, as long as someone else remains, *Frank will be there*.

"Knowing So Much / About Others"

What motivates O'Hara to imagine and cultivate this space, somewhere between the everyday and the poetic? When John Ashbery writes that O'Hara's poetry makes room for "the reader who turns to poetry as a last resort in trying to juggle the contradictory components of modern life into something like a livable space," he could be describing the O'Hara we have glimpsed so far, always the vitalizing life of the party—or poem.[39] But what contradictions of "modern life" provide the basis for O'Hara's poetic attempt to live with and within them? One year after the composition of "A Party Full of Friends," in a poem entitled "Prose for the Times," O'Hara presents a darkly comic allegory that again uses the terms "party" and "poem" to explore the limitations and promise of his work's burgeoning investment in the friction between social experience and the poetic. It begins:

> Yesterday I accepted an invitation to a party. But I had no sooner arrived and let my coat tumble, exhausted, onto a bed, when a perfect stranger whom I immediately and unwittingly admired asked me if I were a poet.
>
> Many guests crowded around the two of us, as at a wedding. "I suppose I am," I said, "for I do write poems."
>
> "Well write one now, will you?" he said, smiling fiercely. . . . (*PR* 70)

Although we are used to hearing about, as one friend remembers it, "Frank's legendary capacity for friendship,"[40] this poem's "perfect stranger" and his fierce smile, as much a threat as a kindness, might serve as an emblem for the deep *ambivalence* toward friendship that, as Andrew Epstein has argued, informs O'Hara's poetry.[41] O'Hara's reputation for dashing off on-the-spot occasional poems, so central to the legend of his generous sociability, here entails a potentially dangerous (as we will see) imposition: "Well write one now, will you?" And whereas in "A Party Full of Friends" the identity of the "poet" seems to depend upon his getting the ear of a figure of intimacy and strangeness ("[o]r my name isn't // Frank O'Hara"), in this case an encounter

with an "immediately . . . admired" albeit "perfect stranger" inspires only a reluctant assertion of poetic identity ("I suppose I am . . . for I do write poems"), one that is quickly undercut by the refusal of the stranger's appeal for a poem: " 'I'm sorry, but I don't feel like one just now, if you don't mind,' I said, thinking of many things, chiefly, perhaps, of childhood, when I would make myself vomit so I wouldn't have to go to parties" (*PR* 70).

The most arresting aspect of the allegory presented by "Prose for the Times," however, is its emphasis on the erotics bound up with and partly accounting for this ambivalent negotiation of the social and the poetic—an erotics that suggests just how much O'Hara's stylistic negotiation of these imbricated worlds is a queer one.[42] Certainly there is something queer about the meeting between the intimate stranger and possible poet in "Prose for the Times," which anticipates O'Hara's oft-cited, semi-satirical statement of poetics, "Personism: A Manifesto," in situating "the poem squarely between the poet and the person, Lucky Pierre style."[43] Here the "poet," "immediately and unwittingly" drawn to the "stranger," focuses his cruising eye specifically on how "[a] few tendrils of hair escaped the opening of his shirt" while their chance encounter, charged with the frisson of the pas de deux between knowing and unknowing, promise and risk, plays out with all the choreography of a "wedding" ritual (*PR* 70). *Are you? Do you? Will you?* After the poet coyly brushes off the stranger's request—part come-on, part taunt—for a poem, the scene's erotic tension becomes unavoidably explicit:

> "Well, what makes you feel like writing one?" he said, and kicked me in the balls.
>
> Ugh!
>
> As I hobbled to a chair, however, I managed to somewhat regain my composure. "You needn't be afraid of me," I said, turning. "I don't love you." (*PR* 70)

Slipping uneasily into slapstick violence rather than sexual or indeed poetic consummation, the poem's conclusion frames the constitutive meeting of poet and would-be reader as an erotic encounter gone awry, its final declaration asserting that the poet's particular form of "love"—or is it poetry?—might be something both desired and feared, and its pursuit thus fraught with danger.

It is in this sense that "Prose for the Times" takes the temperature of its times, particularly within O'Hara's social circle, where the era's phobic suspicions and the violence hounding queerness engendered, among other anxieties, poetic uncertainty. John Ashbery claims not to have been able to "write anything from about the summer of 1950 to the end of 1951": "The

Korean War was on," he recalls, and "there were anti-homosexual campaigns. I was called up for the draft and I pleaded that as a reason not to be drafted. Of course this was recorded and I was afraid that we'd all be sent to concentration camps if McCarthy had his own way. It was a very dangerous and scary period."[44] Histories of Cold War sexuality have shown how during this period, as Gavin Butt writes, "in the absence of reliable signifiers of homosexual difference, and given the widespread rumors about the large number of gays in the arts . . . artistic identity *itself* becomes phobically charged with queerness," such that the male artist, especially, "is constantly shadowed by queer meaning."[45] O'Hara literalizes such shadowing of the suspect artist when, in "A Young Poet," he depicts the poet of the title as "taken for a junky or a pervert/by police/who follow him,/as he should be followed, but not by them" (*CP* 279).[46]

Following the poet "as he should be followed," O'Hara's work enters into and valorizes a queer network of desire paradoxically limned by homophobic gossip. Rather than disavowing the gossip that keeps queer meanings in circulation around the poet and poetic production, O'Hara embraces and redeploys it, proclaiming in "To the Poem": "Let us do something grand," something "small and important and/unAmerican" (*CP* 175). In the mischievously titled *Kenneth Koch, a Tragedy*, his self-declared "great collaborative play" with Larry Rivers, "which cannot be printed because it is so filled with 50s art gossip that everyone would sue us," O'Hara has Koch's character recall with mock anxiousness: "They called me 'queer' and I thought they meant I was a poet, so I became a poet. What if I'd understood them?"[47] Recognizing how "poet" can signify "queer," O'Hara wittily intimates that "queer" can in turn signify "poet," as if one identity might insinuate the other.[48] And as "Prose for the Times" suggests, in the culture of suspicion surrounding postwar American sexuality, a culture fueled by the Kinsey report and McCarthyism, they often did. As sexuality and poetry blur in "Prose for the Times," O'Hara diagnoses and plays on the fears of his era, considering that to make poetry out of one's queer social world during a "dangerous and scary period" involves accepting an invitation to an uncertain encounter and perhaps creating something out of even this encounter's violent failures. If "[y]esterday" the poet was "exhausted" and could only "suppose" he was "a poet," these failures are, all the same, presumably what make him "feel like writing" the poem that we read today.

As an instrument of Cold War political power, gossip seeks out, produces, and disciplines the nonnormative; it harries queerness. Yet the negative

affect that motors such gossip, implicit in the scene of malicious knowingness about poetic identity in "Prose for the Times," is less opposed to than at the ambivalent heart of O'Hara's poetic engagement with gossip and this engagement's queer erotics. Further, O'Hara's ambivalence about gossip arises not only from his experience of the culture-at-large's phobic networks of suspicion but also and just as immediately from the vexing experience of his own social circle's queer gossip. In a 1954 letter that gossips about gossip, for example, O'Hara describes running into a friend at the Cedar Tavern who

> had a very unattractive "old friend" with him who indulged in a great deal of homosexual detraction—that which is known as dishing to some of our acquaintances, that "Oh my dear, I know she was heaven, but even Garbo can get *old*, can't she?" type of wit and wisdom, which is usually followed by something like "Of course, I adore Cocteau's *movies*, but I had *him* in 1931 in Barcelona and it was nothing like what you'd expect." Not that there aren't a lot of heterosexuals of similar persuasion, but they usually have to be drunk to talk that way (remember "I had you last summer and you're a lousy lay"—J Pollock?), they don't seem to make quite so much of a professional attitude out of it.[49]

If O'Hara's target, here, is a distinctively "homosexual" form of gossip marked by camp effeminacy, his parody of this style nonetheless evinces an interest in its workings and effects, and even a begrudging respect for it. Whatever the flaws of "homosexual detraction," it is a "persuasion" not easily adopted, as the example of the macho Pollock's amateur, amusingly inept attempt at "dishing" makes clear. O'Hara even humorously conflates "detraction" and homosexuality by positioning each as a "persuasion" that "heterosexuals" might experiment with when "drunk." In contrast, O'Hara's *own* pointed gossip in this passage indicates his familiarity with what provokes him and suggests that part of what motivates his critique of detraction is that he himself keeps slipping all too comfortably into it.

The uneasy pleasures of this passage take their place among several poems from the period in which we find O'Hara coming to terms with what gossip means for him and what it might mean for his poetry. In his 1956 poem "The Bores," O'Hara similarly skewers "homosexual detraction" and its effete practitioners. "Detraction is their game," he begins. "Like parrots, they caw forth/the ennui of the last time/that was theirs" (*CP* 240). Here again, O'Hara disparages "dishing" as "empty," a trivializing "game" meant to "entertain each other" (*CP* 240). But his chief complaint seems to be that detraction reduces or takes away from the value of one's world, whereas, at

its best, gossip is accretive, conferring interest on the lives, objects, and details that surround us. Unlike Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's celebration of gossip as a vital, non-reductive form of "nonce taxonomy," O'Hara's "bores" "take each/singular event for someone's/dear convention" (*CP* 240).[50]

"Spleen," a short poem about gossip written just before O'Hara's 1954 letter about "homosexual detraction," distills these tensions between gossip's bad feeling and its queer pleasures, and helps us to bring out O'Hara's productively conflicted sense of gossip as his muse—a sense informed by both the midcentury dangers of queer disclosure and the irritations of queer detraction, and at odds with the more common image of O'Hara as a "[c]hatty prophet," buoyantly afloat on the dazzling surface of "deep gossip." Spleen, an affective state of spite, moroseness, and melancholy conceived of as rooted in the body, linked to artistic genius, and manifesting a nervous response to modernity, was familiar to O'Hara foremost from his enthusiastic reading of Charles Baudelaire, who describes it in *Paris Spleen* as "some malicious Demon" that "gets into us, forcing us, in spite of ourselves, to carry out his most absurd whims."[51] Baudelaire's figure calls to mind O'Hara's image of the muse as "my demon my dish" (*CP* 52), and in "Spleen" O'Hara reflects on how this "demon" indeed "gets into" and possesses him, seemingly in spite of himself:

> I know so much
> about things, I accept
> so much, it's like
> vomiting. And I am
> nourished by the
> shabbiness of my
> knowing so much
> about others and what
> they do, and accepting
> so much that I hate
> as if I didn't know
> what it is, to me.
> And what it is to
> them I know, and hate. (*CP* 187)

Describing gossip as the "shabbiness of my/knowing so much/about others and what/they do," O'Hara, here, plays with the negative stereotype of the gossip as merely and mindlessly regurgitating greedily consumed dish. Yet,

even as O'Hara claims to "accept/so much," "Spleen" seems formally to have accepted as little as possible, working within a purposefully restricted lexicon whose every word it worries. This poem of fourteen two- to three-beat lines resembles a half-swallowed, half-spit-out sonnet, and chewing for these fourteen terse lines on his taste for distasteful dish, O'Hara examines how the relationship between disgust and desire plays a central role in gossip and its commitment to the sordid details of dishing the dirt. When William Ian Miller writes of disgust that it "might bring in its train affects that work to move one closer again to what one just backed away from," affects ranging "from curiosity, to fascination, to a desire to mingle," he could just as easily be describing gossip, which can in one breath recoil, *How horrible!* and in the next insist, *Tell me everything*.[52] Or, in the terms of "Spleen," we might say that gossip's way of "knowing" can make "accepting" feel like "vomiting" and "vomiting" seem "nourish[ment]," such that it is difficult to decide whether O'Hara's repeated claim to "know so much" is a disgusted confession or a fascinated boast.

Of course, it is both. O'Hara imagines his poetry more generally if no less ambivalently in terms of "spleen" when, in a letter to Fairfield Porter, he ostensibly criticizes his own work as "full of objects for their own sake, spleen and ironically intimate observation which may be truthfulness (in the lyrical sense) but is more likely to be egotistical cynicism masquerading as honesty."[53] Porter's reply, perhaps sensing the self-valorizing undercurrent of this assessment, shrewdly assures O'Hara that "another name" for the quality of "spleen" in his poetry "is generosity," drawing out the suggestion that aversion can also be a form attraction.[54] O'Hara later says as much in "Joe's Jacket," where we find "the incessant talk of affection/expressed as excitability and spleen" (*CP* 329). In collapsing the opposition between attraction and repulsion, between taking "things" in (or "accepting") and forcing "things" out (or "vomiting"), "Spleen" further suggests how the performance of gossip unsettles distinctions between feeling disgusted and feeling disgusting; between third-person perspectives and feelings (or "what it is to/them") and first-person perspectives or feelings (or "what it is, to me"); and more generally between "others" and self, "they" and "I," "what they *do*" and what "I *am*."

This promiscuous "desire to mingle" subjectivities, inspiring and arising out of disgust, resonates with the progression in "Prose for the Times" from the child who "would make myself vomit so I wouldn't have to go to parties" to the poet who nevertheless "accept[s] an invitation to a party" (if only to

wind up exclaiming, "Ugh!"). ("Sometimes," O'Hara writes in a letter, "I think that all writers were children who vomited when they got nervous."[55]) In "Spleen," too, an ambivalence toward negotiating the intimacy and strangeness of "others" becomes a sign of poetic vocation and carries with it an erotic allure. The poem's thematic and formal dialectic between attraction and repulsion, reception and release, reimagines its seemingly dominant affect, "hate," as also a curious form of desire that, to recall Miller, "work[s] to move one closer again to what one just backed away from." As O'Hara observes in a later poem concerned with the productive role played by "hate" and "shabbiness" in relationships with others, "why be afraid of hate, it is only there/think of filth, is it really awesome/neither is hate" (*CP* 333–34). "[N]ourished" by his eroticized relation to gossip and the "shabbiness" of "knowing" and "accepting/so much" that his culture deems filthy or disgusting, including the practice of gossip itself, O'Hara imagines gossip's performance as a drama of queer relationality and self-making in which one flirts with, is seduced by, and ultimately identifies with the disgusting (we might label its four acts "I know," "I hate," "I accept," and "I am"). "The complex of judgments that are embodied in disgust, the way disgust in fact works," Miller writes, "means that it has to get its hands dirty. How could it be otherwise?" Disgust, he adds, "may even have to be curious about [the disgusting] or fascinated by it to do its job really well, carouse with it after a fashion."[56]

Such queer relationality constitutes one significant aspect of O'Hara's lyric gossip and what I understand less as a critique of his culture's homophobic gossip or of "homosexual detraction" than as an effort to make a livable space within that critique. Put to queer use, this dynamic recalls what Sedgwick identifies as gossip's ability to map "the possibilities, dangers, and stimulations" of one's "social landscape,"[57] and we can see how O'Hara imagines the art of gossip as a valuable queer resource for such mapping in his many poems that treat cruising or public sex.[58] As George Chauncey has documented, in the public sex culture of pre-Stonewall New York, "gay men devised a variety of tactics that allowed them . . . to appropriate for themselves spaces that were not marked as gay, and to construct a gay city in the midst of, yet invisible to, the dominant city."[59] O'Hara's work reveals gossip as one such tactic for recording and transmitting the knowledge, emotions, and practices of queer cultures: creating, sometimes out of the materials of a hostile official record, unofficial histories, world-making counter-archives of what is *off* the record—mapping a city within the city.

In the 1953 poem "Grand Central," for instance, O'Hara speaks *as* Grand Central Station, presenting his voice as the gossipy heart of New York's infrastructure: "The wheels inside me are thundering," he begins; and in an image that suggests Ovid's vision of the House of Fame and its vast, unruly archive of gossip, he speaks as "an expanse of marble floor / covered with commuters and information" (*CP* 168). This "information" is chiefly sexual gossip, and in the final stanza the voice of the terminal comes alive as it relates in detail one particularly juicy bit: "During the noon-hour rush a friend / of mine took a letter carrier across / the catwalk underneath the dome," "knelt inside my cathedral," "unzipped the messenger's trousers / and relieved him of his missile, hands / on the messenger's dirty buttocks, / the smoking muzzle in his soft blue mouth" (*CP* 169). In "Homosexuality," from 1954, O'Hara similarly slips into the voice of a queer urban space of sex and gossip. "It's wonderful to admire oneself / with complete candor, tallying up the merits of each // of the latrines," he writes, fluidly moving from the "merits" of "oneself" to the "merits" of restrooms known for public sex, such that one stands in for the other: "14th Street is drunken and credulous," he dishes, while "53rd tries to tremble but is too at rest" (*CP* 182). Here O'Hara literally charts the gay city in the midst of, but mostly invisible to, the dominant city, illustrating how gossip can serve as a valuable way of knowing for queer cultures, and, even more, how gossip and cruising appear—at least to O'Hara—as kindred queer practices, each forms of intimacy that traffic in the seemingly disgusting and are regarded by the normative culture with disgust, each forms of intimacy with strangeness, each forms whose performance of privacy holds out the potential to remap the contours of public spaces.

The voices in these poems are both intimate and inanimate, bodily and disembodied, intensely personal yet ultimately anonymous—much like the spaces of gossip and public sex from which they emanate, spaces menaced but also queerly charged by the "shabbiness" of "knowing so much / about others and what / they do"—and they suggest how O'Hara's gossip more generally claims a space within the contours of midcentury lyric for the circulation of queerness. Turning inside out disgust and desire, these poems do something "small and important and / unAmerican" by constructing "something like a livable space" for the shabby, filthy, dirty, gossipy—a space unwittingly nourished by the very culture that would find it disgusting. "I don't have an American / body, I have an anonymous body," O'Hara writes in "Grand Central," adding, "though / you can get to love it" (*CP* 168).

"You Can't Gossip about Yourself"

So far we have seen how O'Hara responds to his era's phobic sexual suspicion and to the needs of queer cultures with a stylized performance of gossip that seeks to reimagine varied social spaces—ranging from the intimate party to the anonymous city to the textual space of the poem—as livable worlds for a queer network that ripples out from an empirical inner circle to more affectively and temporally distant readers. Is one internal or external to an exchange of gossip, a social circle, a community, a culture, a poem? Is one an intimate or a stranger? Is one within or without oneself and one's desires, disgusted or disgusting? O'Hara's gossip contends with and amplifies these pressing questions as it maps the queer terrain of his social and poetic landscapes.

In line with such queer world-making efforts, O'Hara's use of gossip has been understood primarily as a function of community or friendship. Bruce Boone's important early analysis of O'Hara's "gay language" briefly identifies O'Hara's gossip as an example of a "language practice [that] calls up and relates, or narrates, a community," and numerous subsequent readers have noted his gossip in passing, as Srikanth Reddy writes, as a "social form [that] consolidates a larger collective identity."[60] In his study of friendship and postwar poetry, Epstein demonstrates how O'Hara often seeks to manage his relationships "in the realm of the text rather than 'real' life," an observation that accords with the consensus among those few critics who attend more specifically to O'Hara's gossip.[61] Hazel Smith, for instance, views the gossip in O'Hara's poetry as part of "a strategy for regulating relationships: a way of bringing out into the open, and at the same time containing, tensions," and David Trotter, too, suggests that O'Hara's gossip works to "ensur[e] a certain fluidity in his relationships with other people" by alternating gossipers and gossipees, those he gossips with and about, so that "the group is sustained without ever separating into permanent alignments."[62] Focusing on this dynamic's objectified gossipees, Trotter—in a view loosely shared by Smith and Epstein—sees O'Hara's gossip as a productive *denial* of intimacy, insofar as it temporarily distances O'Hara from his "feeling" for whichever friends he takes "as the objects of an impersonal curiosity," therefore ensuring "a continuous redistribution of roles," and no set "hierarchy" of friendships.[63]

Without refuting these useful takes on gossip's relationship to the fluid social logics of O'Hara's poetry, I do want, by way of retracing where my discussion has been and where it has been headed, to pause over two of

their tacit assumptions about O'Hara's gossip—the first being that although O'Hara's poetry engages in a relatively benign form of gossip's othering, it is better in this scenario to be the gossiper than the objectified gossipee; and the second that O'Hara's poetic gossip is fundamentally about other people. These basic ideas are not specific to O'Hara criticism; in fact, they are widely understood as definitional aspects of gossip in general. To complicate their basis in O'Hara's poetry, then, is to ask how that poetry itself seeks to reimagine gossip. More specifically, to question the first assumption is to suggest the queer agency that O'Hara's poetry locates in the unauthorized selves objectified and circulated by gossip. To question the second assumption, meanwhile, is to contend that O'Hara's lyric gossip pursues a version of such agency through the self-othering strategy of gossiping about himself. In so doing he seeks to transform, as much as the social spaces of friendship and community that have been the focus of his readers, the solitary space prevalently imagined for lyric subjectivity.

Conventional wisdom tells us that to be gossiped about is to be absented and objectified, and it accords relatively greater agency and power to gossipers; yet one of the most curious aspects of O'Hara's gossip is the immediacy and intimacy of its relationship to its gossipees, whose objectification is often paradoxically imagined as a form of agency—indeed, an agency that infringes on the gossip's own. O'Hara, recall, understands the "spleen" of good dish as expressing as well a form of "generosity" toward its objects, or what he terms in "Joe's Jacket" "the incessant talk of affection." "If we were some sort of friends I might have to bitch you," he writes in "Day and Night in 1952" (*CP* 93).[64] Bill Berkson similarly recollects of O'Hara's "terrible" gossip, "He gleaned a whole repertoire of anecdotes out of every day. He dramatized your words to others. If you heard them, or if they came back to you, they weren't exactly *your* words, his voice was too much his own—but he showed what they meant in his terms. Nobody ever seemed to mind."[65] Berkson's anecdote suggests how O'Hara's lyric gossip, not exactly someone else's words but not exactly his own, either, places gossip's other in a liminal space of unauthorized agency. Gossip in this sense becomes a way—both ironic and intimate, bitchy and friendly, shabby and generous, objectifying *and* animating—for O'Hara to temporarily give himself over, as in "Spleen," to the agency of "others and what/they do."

When we turn to instances of gossip in the poems themselves, we can see how a frequent strategy of O'Hara's talk about absent others is to make them present, bringing them imaginatively into rather than excluding them

from the experience of the poem. The gossipy "Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul" is representative in its use of dish to gather together a series of names:

> and Allen is back talking about god a lot
> and Peter is back not talking very much
> and Joe has a cold and is not coming to Kenneth's
> although he is coming to lunch with Norman
> I suspect he is making a distinction
> well, who isn't (*CP* 328)

Each member of this network of friends is apprehended as internal or external—to the city (Allen and Peter are "back," while Norman is saying, "Adieu"), to the conversation ("talking" or "not talking"), to a "weekend coming up / at excitement-prone Kenneth Koch's" ("Joe . . . is not coming"), and to a "lunch with Norman" (*CP* 328). The one space they all inhabit together, of course, is the space of the poem, suggesting how the poet and gossip who has elaborated this dishy list of distinctions is yet the only one not "making a distinction," as his gossip simultaneously excludes *and* includes the various objects of its talk.[66]

In similar fashion, in "To Richard Miller"—a 1958 sonnet addressed to the publisher of the Tiber Press, which would soon bring out O'Hara's *Odes*, a volume including prints by Mike Goldberg—O'Hara gossips with Miller about the apparently missing in action Goldberg, yet it is Goldberg, being gossiped about, who seems more intimately connected to O'Hara, who begins by conjecturing:

> Where is Mike Goldberg? I don't know,
> he may be in the Village far below
> or lounging on Tenth street with the gang (*CP* 301)

Goldberg "may be in the Village," or "on Tenth street," but he is certainly in the poem, and gradually the poem's loose speculations about his possible activities accumulate an agency of their own and even a kind of poetic authority, standing in, in a manner both jokey and erotic, for poems O'Hara does "not intend to write":

> Maybe he is living sketches of an ODE
> ON SEX which I do not intend to write
> in his abode or drinking bourbon in the light (*CP* 301)

The increasingly clunky rhymes that commandeer the sonnet's logic mirror and accentuate how O'Hara's gossip begins to speak for itself—a development especially appropriate since the poem and its dish have been inspired by O'Hara's inability to account for or control Goldberg's actions in the first place: "I will goad / him into Tibering and hope all's for the best," O'Hara weakly concludes (*CP* 301).

The agency O'Hara posits for those objectified by his gossip becomes even more explicit in a garrulous passage from "The 'Unfinished,'" in which, "back in New York," he finds that

> Gregory is back in New York and we are still missing
> each other in the Cedar and in hotel lobbies where Salvador Dali is
> supposed to sleep and at Anne Truxell's famous giggling parties
> until one fine day (*vedremo*) we meet over a duck dinner, good god
> I just remembered what he stuffed it with, you guessed it: oranges!
> and perhaps, too, he is the true narrator of this story, Gregory
> no, I must be, because he's in Chicago (*CP* 318–319)

Where is Gregory? I don't know. . . . This catalogue of missed connections puts forward a number of possible meeting places for O'Hara and Gregory Corso, all spaces of gossip—the buzzing city, "the Cedar" bar, "hotel lobbies" where Dali is rumored "to sleep," the painter "Anne Truxell's famous giggling parties." Even when the two do finally "meet over a duck dinner," the odd temporality of this meal frames it as another missed connection: "one fine day (*vedremo*)," an allusion to Giacomo Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly* and its aria "Un bel di, vedremo" or "One fine day, we'll see," superimposes the future tense of "*vedremo*" onto the lyric present tense of "we meet"; for good measure, O'Hara then refers to the meeting in the past tense ("I just remembered what he stuffed it with, you guessed it: oranges!"). Hence, just when O'Hara and Gregory at last converge in one place, it is at seemingly different times, such that they "are still missing / each other" everywhere but within the space of the poem's fantastic "one fine day." In *this* space of gossip Gregory, the object of O'Hara's gossipy monologue, is given authority as "perhaps" its "true narrator." These lines generally call to mind, as discussed in my first chapter, Gertrude Stein's interest in the peculiar agency of being talked about, illustrated most starkly by the narrative conceit of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. More specifically, these lines conjure a tricky authorial moment in "5 Participants in a Hearsay Panel" (also, recall, from 1959), when Elaine de Kooning adds, after reading a poem by

"Frank," "Frank has asked me to announce that none of the sentiments expressed in this poem are his. They're mine" (151). They also recall O'Hara's use of metalepsis in "A Party Full of Friends" and how his comic failure to keep Arnie from entering the poem connotes a loss of autonomy to the objects of his gossip. Here, O'Hara generates an almost metaleptic effect as he gabs about Gregory so much that he not only appears in the poem as a present absence but "perhaps" becomes its "true narrator."

Yet the word "perhaps" seems crucial insofar as it admits the extent to which the poet can perhaps never really significantly unsettle his own authority. In fact, O'Hara's claim to do so confirms as much as dispels that authority: after all, one must have authority in the first place to entertain giving it up. Is there is an ultimate coerciveness to O'Hara's apparent ceding of agency to others? Tempting as it may be to view O'Hara's poetic turn to culturally feminized gossip as a corrective to masculinist modernist discourses of the rational, autonomous self, his poetics also appears to belong to those "formations of literary postmodernisms where," as Michael Davidson has shown, "the attempt to go beyond the artisanal poetics of high modernism often replicates phallic ideas of power, energy, and virtuosity that it would seem to contest."[67] Along these lines, O'Hara's "perhaps"—not to mention his lived experience of queer forms of suspended or canceled agency—indicates a certain self-reflexivity about the pernicious ways mastery can become most assured when most disavowed. The unlikely agency O'Hara imagines for the gossipee thus presents not simply a critique of the authority and autonomy that undergird notions of the modern lyric self but—as with his ambivalence toward gossip—a more complicated effort to find a livable space within such critique by exploring alternate, provisional forms of authority that his poems can designate as possibilities if perhaps never truly inhabit.

Recognizing the strange, unauthorized agency that O'Hara wants to locate in being gossiped about hence helps to clarify the sly strategies of poetic self-fashioning in poems such as "Homosexuality," where "with complete candor" he discusses himself as a city space, occupying both the subject and object positions of the poem's dish. This collapsing of subject and object positions and their first- and third-person speech—at issue as well in "Spleen"—points toward the second and most significant way in which O'Hara contravenes not only standard critical assumptions about his gossip but also the conventions of gossip itself, which is by definition about other people. O'Hara's gossip is at times not about *people* at all, calling into question much

more fundamental distinctions between the subjects and objects of gossip. In "Homosexuality" he gossips about "the latrines"; in "The Lover," he baffles the commonsense claim that, as one theorist of gossip quips, "We can't gossip about carburetors or the weather,"[68] by gossiping, in a rhetorical move akin both to the pathetic fallacy and apostrophe, about nature: "The mean moon is like a nasty/little lemon above the ubiquitous/sniveling fir trees," he writes (*CP* 46). Such instances of gossip about inanimate objects have the effect of animating them, underlining the similar but less expected vivifying effects of O'Hara's objectifying talk about people.

These quickening effects provide one explanation for why, when O'Hara's poetry does (as is much more common) gossip about another *person*, it tends to disclose as much about O'Hara as anyone else. Ashbery asserts that O'Hara's work "is almost exclusively autobiographical. Even at its most abstract, or even when it seems to be telling someone else's story . . . it is emerging out of his life."[69] Even a poem that announces itself as "A Party Full of Friends," one might add, is ultimately most full of O'Hara himself. However knowingly, gossipers do perform and reveal themselves to an audience; to gossip is always to risk to some degree one's own reputation alongside that of the gossipee. Andy Warhol remarks in *POPism* that "one thing I've always liked to do is hear what people think of each other—you learn just as much about the person who's talking as about the person who's getting dished,"[70] a claim neatly illustrated by a blast of gossip in O'Hara's poem "Day and Night in 1952":

> John, for instance, thinks I am the child of my own old age; Jimmy is cagey with snide remarks while he washes dishes and I pose in the bathroom; Jane is rescuing herself at the mercy of her ill temper towards me which is expressed only in the riddles of her motival phantasies; what am I to say of Larry? who really resents the fact that I may be conning him instead of Vice and Art; Grace may secretly distrust me but we are both so close to the abyss that we must see a lot of each other . . . but the other John catches every one of my innuendi the wrong way or at the very least obliquely and is never mistaken or ill-tempered, which is what I worry about the most. What can I do? (*CP* 93–94)

Smith cites this passage as an example of O'Hara's gossip about others, but it is more accurate to say that in this instance he takes great pleasure in dishing himself.[71] What can he do? Throughout his work, O'Hara self-reflexively deploys the insight expressed in Warhol's remark, using gossip to construct and convey self. He and Larry Rivers humorously adapt this technique in the

relentlessly gossipy *Kenneth Koch, a Tragedy*, reserving the drama's most devastating gossip for its own authors:

KENNETH:
You wouldn't talk this way if Larry or Frank were here.

LEWITIN:
Those phonies.

JACKSON POLLOCK:
Those fags.

FRANZ KLINE:
Those dope addicts.

GEORGE:
Those cheapskates.[72]

"What've they got to do with all of this?" a character shortly asks, and the answer, clearly, is everything: gossip, here, becomes a form of playful, circuitous self-disclosure.[73] *Have you heard what they're saying about me?*

Even Warhol, while asserting that the gossip reveals the self, nevertheless contends that "you can't gossip *about* yourself."[74] But O'Hara often does just this in his poetry, talking about himself behind his back in front of his face, one might say, as an eroticized mode of aesthetic self-making. In "Dialogues," for example, he recirculates dish about himself ("You call me Mr. de Winter / behind my back, smiling, not without gentleness") and takes pride that others are "dining on my image" (*CP* 240, 241), while in one of his many poems entitled "On Rachmaninoff's Birthday" he similarly reports:

I am so glad that Larry Rivers made a
statue of me

and now I hear that my penis is on all
the statues of all the young sculptors who've
seen it (*CP* 190)

Later in the poem, referring to this gossip's objectification as much as the nude "statue" that it buzzes about, O'Hara happily admits, "I am what people make of me—if they / can and when they will"—seemingly claiming to have given the fashioning of his self up to others' authority and "what people make" of him, whether through gossip or art (*CP* 190).[75] But O'Hara, not

simply resigned to being made by others, proves complicit in this making by passing on gossip about himself, becoming both subject and object of gossip, eagerly taking up in his poem the unauthorized agency of being gossiped about in order to make something of himself. More than anyone else, O'Hara here is dining on his image.[76]

Self-Gossip

O'Hara often pushes the limits of gossip even further, gossiping not only *about* himself but also disregarding the convention that, since gossip is an essentially social activity, "we do not," as Aaron Ben-Ze'ev reminds us, "gossip *to* ourselves."[77] In the poem "Olive Garden," for instance, the solitary poet is "too tired for companionship" but not too tired for the dish about himself that he divulges to himself: "Some disinfatuated fisherman will say of me 'He just wanted to go somewhere,' and indeed it will make for the tears of intimacy to hear. I am truly filthy, and not the most bitchy could guess the whimsicality of my retreats, the arabesque of my faltering. Ah! what do I mean of myself?" (*CP* 92). As O'Hara writes in "Essay on Style," "I was reflecting the other night meaning/I was being reflected upon" (*CP* 393).

Such a mode of self-disclosure evokes John Stuart Mill's description of lyric poetry as "feeling, confessing itself to itself" (is this *feeling, dishing itself to itself*?) and more immediately invites comparison with midcentury confessional poetics.[78] Despite a shared interest in personal disclosure, O'Hara's work is often framed as "anti-confessional,"[79] an antagonism encouraged by a frequently quoted moment in a 1965 interview in which O'Hara derides Robert Lowell's "confessional manner which [lets him] get away with things that are really just plain bad but you're supposed to be interested because he's supposed to be so upset."[80] Critics less often quote the interviewer's turning O'Hara's comments on Lowell back on his own work: "What you've just said about Lowell is in fact very characteristic, it seems to me, of your own verse."[81] O'Hara does not disagree. This is not to read O'Hara's lack of overt dissent as somehow indicating that Lowell's work is actually closely akin to his own or even that the two divergent poets have more in common than not. Perhaps, however, it does suggest that their work differs in more subtle ways than most critics would have it and that their shared cultural moment, in which secrecy, disclosure, sexuality, and politics are bound together, compels a more nuanced consideration of poetic confession (in and beyond Lowell) in relation to O'Hara's lyric gossip. In practice, certainly, the difference between confession and gossip can be difficult to discern: con-

fession might be merely the high cultural version of gossip's low discourse, substituting the model of the psychoanalytic session and its talking cure for that of the telephone chat and its daily dose of dish. In theory, however, the ideal of confession seeks to uncover and inhabit the putative truth of the self, while gossip thrives on the pleasurable mutability of truths and identities. As James Breslin writes, "Rather than struggling to recover a lost core of identity, O'Hara creates a theatricalized self that is never completely disclosed in any of its 'scenes.'"[82] Where O'Hara's confessional contemporaries provocatively pursue self-authorized identities, his lyric gossip revels, as we have seen, in the possibilities of unauthorized selves, or "what people make of" him, suggesting gossip as a useful frame for considering alternative (if not necessarily oppositional) forms of postwar poetic self-disclosure beyond confession.

We might better understand these extreme instances of O'Hara's gossip, then, as *self-gossip*, in the dual sense that O'Hara is talking about himself but also dramatically indulging in what the sociologist Erving Goffman calls "self-talk," or the social taboo of talking to oneself: when, speaking aloud, "we address an absent other or address ourselves in the name of some standard-bearing voice" (79). Goffman asserts that to be caught in the "peculiar" performance of self-talk, which involves "more roles than persons," is humiliating: "Self-talk might appear to be a kind of perversion," he writes, "a form of linguistic self-abuse" akin to "masturbation" (80). What appears perverse, in other words, is not so much to talk to oneself—surely a common enough occurrence when one presumes to be alone—but to be found talking to oneself and, even worse, to *continue* doing so. More than an embarrassment, such persistent self-talk presents "a threat to intersubjectivity; it warns others that they might be wrong in assuming a jointly maintained base of ready mutual intelligibility among all persons present" (85). Self-talk, in Goffman's account, perversely circulates the private in public, hailing us as both intimates and strangers, and we are left wondering just how much of this talk is meant for us, caught up in the friction of its seductions and its irritations.

If self-talk, as Goffman writes, "involves lifting a form of interaction from its natural place and its employment in a special way," then O'Hara's self-gossip, in lifting his poetry's dish from its usual scenario and restaging it as a solitary drama, represents a further insetting of the performance of his lyric gossip more generally, which already redeploys the social interaction of gossip within the space of lyric poetry (83). Thinking specifically about

O'Hara's self-gossip therefore brings into relief the broader investment of his lyric gossip in reimagining, rather than simply rejecting, the solitary space of lyric subjectivity, or what Helen Vendler calls "the performance of the mind in *solitary* speech."[83] Goffman's account of self-talk can make it sound oddly like prevailing midcentury accounts of lyric poetry. In self-talk "we address an absent other or address ourselves"; in the lyric, writes Northrop Frye, the "poet normally pretends to be talking to himself or to someone else" other than the reader.[84] "All poetry is of the nature of soliloquy," claims Mill,[85] and although Goffman's focus is not on literary language, he does consider "the soliloquy" in terms of self-talk, claiming that it "is not really an exception to the application of the rule against public self-talk. Your soliloquizer is really talking to self when no one is around; we members of the audience are supernatural, out-of-frame eavesdroppers. Were a character from the dramatized world to approach, our speaker . . . would stop soliloquizing" (83). Goffman suggests that the dramatic soliloquy is not "public self-talk" as long as it artfully ignores its "out-of-frame-eavesdroppers," maintaining the illusion of its privacy—a formulation that recalls persistent understandings of the lyric as "preeminently the utterance that is overheard," or more precisely the utterance that we "out-of-frame eavesdroppers" must be able *to read as if* overheard in order to maintain lyric decorum.[86] In self-talk, that is, it is "the witnessing of the deed which transforms it into an improper one," just as proper lyric, as Mill writes, requires that "no trace of consciousness that any eyes are upon us must be visible in the work itself" (81).[87]

Is lyric a form of inviolate self-talk, awaiting only its being caught out to seem perverse? When Goffman differentiates self-talk from "inner speech" on the basis that the former is out loud and often wildly animated, the latter silent and meditative, he suggests one way that the solitary lyric's exalted use of language keeps from appearing "a form of linguistic self-abuse": lyric discreetly *speaks*; self-talk volubly *talks* (80). Discussing talk, Steven Connor notes how "English maintains a subtle but sustained set of distinctions between talking and speaking," such that to *talk* implies a lack of agency or conscious thought, whereas to *speak* connotes authority and purpose.[88] Talking designates the casual, the gratuitous; it is more about the act itself than any particular information or aim (as in idle talk, small talk, or girl talk). Talk can drift into the mindless or automatic (think: talking heads, talking through your hat, or talking in your sleep) and more generally hints that one is not in control of one's language (as in loose talk, or *he's all talk*). Speaking, in

contrast, suggests formality and design, and a desire to convey a particular meaning. Certainly there are exceptions to these differences in usage. But the nuanced distinction in English between talking and speaking points toward one of the reasons forms of talk like gossip can seem so far apart from the lyric: gossip stereotypically seems a feminine way of talking; the modern lyric ideal imagines a masculine form of speaking (poetic practice, to be sure, being another matter). Even William Wordsworth, famously in pursuit of a poetry of ordinary language, maintained that the poet is "a man *speaking* to men" and tellingly opposed the speech of poets to the feminized gossip "[a]bout Friends . . . Or Neighbours" that he called "personal *talk*."[89]

The critical concept of the poetic speaker that quietly emerges out of the New Criticism, becoming standard in the 1950s, underlines this distinction.[90] The idea of the speaker provided principally a term for distinguishing the biographical person who writes a text from the person who speaks within it but also, implicitly, a term that could be called on to sort neatly the gossipy talk of biography from the voice that speaks poetry—at precisely the historical moment when the seeming distance high modernism had imposed between these entities was being newly challenged by postwar poetic practices ranging from Beat poetry to confessional verse to the talky lyrics of O'Hara.[91] O'Hara's talk troubles the interpretive expectation of a speaker, or (in Virginia Jackson's terms) an "abstract personification in place of the historical person."[92] His "conversational voice," Breslin writes, "along with his whole way of assuming our familiarity with his small circle of friends in New York, creates a very strong sense that the poems are spoken by an empirical individual, not the persona of New Criticism."[93] When O'Hara complains in a 1965 interview about "the New Criticism and certain rather stupid ideas about how, about what is the comportment in diction that you adopt,"[94] he seems to have in mind predominant notions of the poem, as Winifred Nowottny puts it in her 1962 study *The Language Poets Use*, as "a fiction uttered by a poetic 'I,'" and more specifically diction's determining role in the construction of this speaker.[95] As Nowottny expresses it, choice of diction "implies a kind of speaker": "Effective poetry manages its diction so that the words chosen provide the point of view," and "in so far as a particular kind of *persona* is necessary to the poem, the poet's diction must create it."[96] If the concept of the poetic speaker implies a measured "comportment in diction"; *talk* suggests the sort of loose or unpredictable bearing that might threaten midcentury notions of "effective poetry." Here, Goffman's account of the embarrassing dynamic of observing a scene of self-talk

might be put into productive conversation with the embarrassments of poetic apostrophes—which also "disrupt the circuit of communication, raising questions about who is the addressee"—as articulated by Jonathan Culler.[97] Just as our critical embarrassment in the face of apostrophes leads us, Culler contends, to turn away from or transform them into more benign description, I would suggest that the embarrassments of confronting lyric as perverse self-talk lead us to repress that talk's presence or reframe it as controlled speech.

O'Hara's poems perform a torrent of "incessant talk": within them "I talk, you talk, / he talks, she talks, it talks," "we talk about things" as "we talk all afternoon" and then "quietly talk all night," and when finally "we are alone" we talk about how "no one is talking" (*CP* 329, 192, 308, 421, 345, 441). Eileen Myles writes of the New York School: "Talk is the throughline in all this work. . . . The talk narrated the New York pace of life, the talk walked you through the party, the hangover."[98] Such nonstop talk has earned O'Hara a reputation as the quintessential poet of sociality. Yet much of this talk, even when anchored by a particular addressee, feels like self-talk. Goffman describes how an invitation to talk "that is openly snubbed or apparently undetected . . . can leave us feeling that we have been caught engaging in something like talking to ourselves" (87), a scenario O'Hara humorously calls attention to in "Day and Night in 1952" when he interrupts the poem to ask of an ambiguous second-person addressee, "I'm talking to you over there, isn't this damn thing working?" (*CP* 93). Finding ways to get the "damn thing" that is lyric poetry "working" would become the basis for O'Hara's celebrated "I do this I do that" poems (*CP* 341), whose poetics of Personism took shape when O'Hara, while writing a poem, "was realizing that if I wanted to I could use the telephone instead of writing the poem, and so Personism was born."[99] Substituting the poetic approximation of a telephone conversation for the actual conversation, or self-talk for talk, O'Hara "lift[s] a form of interaction from its natural place," as Goffman might say, and redeploys it in an unnatural way, posing a purposeful "threat" to social and aesthetic norms of "mutual intelligibility."

In casting the solitary lyric speaker as a self-talker and this self-talker as engaged in self-gossip, O'Hara reimagines lyric self-address and its space of subjectivity in two significant ways. First, he draws out the perversity inherent in the performance of the lyric self, which is always talking to itself in public as if in private, at risk of illicit exposure. Like talking behind someone's back in front of his or her face, perverse self-talk carries on in the presence

of others it treats as absent, effecting a queer mix of privacy and publicity, intimacy and strangeness, that derives its charge from the talker's exposure. Second, by reframing lyric speech as *talk* O'Hara cannily undermines the stability of the poet's claim to an autonomous self that authorizes and unifies the poem. I have argued that O'Hara's poetic gossip about others valorizes effects of exposure and unstable agency as oddly animating; in indecorously positioning himself as both subject and object of dish via his self-gossip, O'Hara amplifies the illicitness of self-talk's and gossip's forms of exposure, and attempts a ceding of poetic agency that allows for the emergence of unauthorized selves.

These strategies for self-fashioning crystallize in "Dido," which presents the extended self-gossip of a "queen," "gloriously ruined," who is also a faded "starlet" and—as this heady mix of classical and Hollywood mythology might suggest—also a feminized camp persona for the poet (*CP* 74, 75). "Dido" initiates its queer self-talk with a question posed and answered by the queen of Carthage herself: "Suppose you really do, toward the end, fall away into a sunset which is your own self-ignited pyre? is it any the less a sunset just because you stopped carrying the torch? I must pull myself together. . ." (*CP* 74). The middle voice implicit in this opening Q&A between a "you" that is also "I" (*I ask myself*), in the "self-ignited pyre" (*I ignite myself*) and in the insistence that "I must pull myself together," announces a self both subject and object of her actions, not least of which is the gossip—to and about the self—by which she attempts to "pull [her]self together." Lamenting her "dear heart, gloriously ruined," she proclaims:

> you advance unawares while misery surrounds you on the lips in the bars, and it accepts you as the characteristic sibilance of its voice, hitherto somewhat less divine.
>
> I could find some rallying ground like pornography or religious exercise, but really, I say to myself, you are too serious a girl for that. . . . If, when my cerise muslin sweeps across the agora, I hear no whispers even if they're really echoes, I know they think I'm on my last legs, "She's just bought a new racing car" they say, or "She's using mercurochrome on her nipples." They'd like to think so. I have a stevedore friend who tells everything that goes on in the harbor. (*CP* 74-75)

"[T]oo serious a girl" for "pornography or religious exercise," Dido turns instead to the divine perversities of self-talk, and particularly self-gossip. Goffman notes how even truly solitary self-talkers "may occasionally find themselves terminating a spate of self-talk with a self-directed reproach,"

thus "catching *themselves* out—sometimes employing self-talk to do so" (81), and something of this doubly perverse, recursive logic inflects the statement "really, I say to myself," which interpolates its self-talk within self-talk. Rather than "terminating a spate of self-talk," however, this speech tag—redundant unless directed toward others—accentuates how the poem's self-talk perversely continues in the presence of others it not only excludes but whose roles it takes on. It is in taking on these roles that the poem becomes most explicitly an instance of self-gossip. Dido transforms the humiliation of being gossip "on the lips in the bars" by voicing that gossip herself: she becomes the sibilant hiss of gossip, providing the "characteristic" tone of "its voice" that now makes its "misery" feel "divine." She is, to recall "Spleen," a self "nourished by the/ shabbiness" of the dish that objectifies her, and, just as her self-talk voices the imagined gossip about her on "the lips in the bars," it will provide the missing "whispers" that she feels *should* trail the sweep of her "cerise muslin" as she moves through the marketplace.

Through the queer performance of dish, "Dido" shuttles between multiple roles, each suggesting an unauthorized self, "gloriously ruined" by gossip. Selling her damaged wares in the "market," "the bars," and "the harbor," and "advertising in the Post Office" (or "the office of letters," as Andrea Brady notes[100]), Dido seems a mythological figure, a fallen starlet, a camp queen, and a poet—and each of these figures is and is not O'Hara himself, who moves fluidly between and intermingles their spaces of gossip, cruising, and poetry as he fantasizes a subjectivity at once objectified and animated by its becoming gossip (*CP* 75). The poem's conclusion appropriately places the authority of its "queen" in the hands of an anonymous somebody—future lover or reader?—whose uncertain arrival promises both her ruin and her triumph: "[I]f this doesn't cost me the supreme purse, my very talent, I'm not the starlet I thought I was. . . . Somebody's got to ruin the queen, my ship's just got to come in" (*CP* 75). "Or my name isn't// Frank O'Hara," one can almost imagine this final line continuing. The extremes of self-gossip in a poem like "Dido" dramatize the strategies at work in poetic gossip less obviously or excessively but no less indelibly marked by the desire to engage and transform the solitary space of lyric subjectivity. O'Hara's "deep gossip" is surely about friendship and community, but it is also deeply about the queer self that attempts to inhabit these social formations. Exploring the "ruin" of this self, O'Hara seeks to reconstitute it, and the world around it, differently—to rethink ruin as possibility, disgust as desire, poetry as perversion, speech as talk, lyric as gossip.

Dishing the Dirt

One last poem will serve to bring together the threads I have been tracing through O'Hara's poetry: gossip, lyric (specifically lyric as a sort of self-talk), and queer culture (specifically, here, the queer culture of public sex), all modes involving a potentially risky, potentially transformative performance of the private in public. This 1959 "Song" (one of O'Hara's six poems to use that title) presents a scene of literal and figurative cruising in which O'Hara once again engages in gossipy sexual speculation about an attractive stranger and further seems—like Goffman's self-talker or a perverse version of Mill's lyric poet—to be talking and gossiping to himself, or pretending to talk to himself, in public. "Song" turns to the social practices of cruising and forms of talk like gossip to tease out the potential queer erotics of midcentury understandings of the lyric as a self-making performance that smudges the lines between private and public, intimacy and strangeness. As O'Hara's letter about homosexual "detraction," or "that which is known as dishing to some of our acquaintances," might suggest, the poem's multivalent opening question—"[i]s it dirty"—engages the gay idiom of *dishing the dirt*. The term "dirt" appears in Gershon Legman's 1941 glossary of American homosexual slang, defined as "gossip or criticism, especially concerning sexual or sexo-social behavior," as does "dish the dirt," marked as an idiom at the time "used exclusively by homosexuals" and defined as "gossip[ing] about the sexual nature, adventures, and misadventures of another homosexual."[101] "Is it dirty" thus signals gossip's queer fascination with the illicit, the erotic, and what seems disgusting:

Is it dirty
does it look dirty
that's what you think of in the city

does it just seem dirty
that's what you think of in the city
you don't refuse to breathe do you

someone comes along with a very bad character
he seems attractive. is he really. yes. very
he's attractive as his character is bad. is it. yes

that's what you think of in the city
run your finger along your no-moss mind
that's not a thought that's soot

and you take a lot of dirt off someone
is the character less bad. no. it improves constantly
you don't refuse to breathe do you (*CP* 327)

This lyrical "Song" about feeling "dirty"—unclean, disgusted, sexual—loosely references villanelle form,[102] using its refrains ("that's what you think of in the city," "you don't refuse to breathe do you," and variations on the question "[i]s it dirty") to edit together dirt, gossip, and sex. As the poem dissolves between the filth everywhere present in "the city," gossip about "someone" who seems as "attractive as his character is bad" ("is he really. yes. very"),[103] and a scene of sexual cruising for "someone" to "take a lot of dirt off" of, dishing the dirt becomes a way of mapping a queer city within the squeaky-clean conformity of the 1950s mainstream cultural terrain. In many ways, "Song" presents—as its title suggests—a more obviously celebratory and less spiteful rewrite of "Spleen," and, as in that poem, O'Hara here concerns himself with the permeable border between the social landscape and the self, the exterior world and the interior space of the poem and indeed poet. The poet's dish, as Miller might say, carouses with dirt and inevitably "get[s] its hands dirty. How could it be otherwise?" *You don't refuse to breathe do you?*

Accordingly, the obsessively mulled-over meanings of "dirty" ("that's what you think of in the city") change over the course of the poem as "dirt" moves from something external to the poet to something also internal. If in the first stanza's repulsed pose the "dirty" is to be avoided and observed only from a safe distance ("[i]s it dirty / does it look dirty"), by the second stanza it appears less conclusively filthy ("does it just seem dirty") and at any rate unavoidable ("you don't refuse to breathe do you"), and by the final stanza it is actively sought out ("you take a lot of dirt off someone") and reimagined as something that "improves" one's "character." Less ambivalently than in "Spleen," this rapid progression from disgust to desire makes a space for the circulation of queerness, thematically positioning, against the official speech of normative culture and its rhetoric of shame surrounding the dirty, the cumulative knowledge of queer culture at work in gossip's dishing the dirt.[104] O'Hara turns to dish as a source for an erotics of style that makes dirt desirable.

This gossipy trajectory from disgust to desire, blurring exterior and interior, accompanies and makes strange the seeming emergence of a lyric self, as the "dirty" surfaces of "the city" become the "dirty" surfaces of "attractive"

bodies; then of others' interiorities, or "character"; and at last the dirty surfaces of an interiority so intimately known it must be the poet's own: "[R]un your finger along your no-moss mind," he instructs himself, "that's not a thought that's soot." This instruction sounds something like the lyric self-address of the poet talking (or pretending to talk) to himself. Yet if this is an apparition of a lyric self, it is one that internalizes the "dirty" exterior space of "the city" to the extent that it can seem, as much as an autonomous subjectivity, instead a resonant *space* of gossip, echoing, like the figures of self as queer urban space we have seen in poems such as "Grand Central" and "Homosexuality," with all of the dirty thoughts one might "think of in the city." Even as the poem's "dirt" moves inward, that is, what we hear remains a communal "Song," repeatable and social.

In this way, "Song" builds toward a lyric self brought out and spoiled by the dirt of gossip. Tracking the poem's ambiguous second-person address—a recurring feature in O'Hara's poetry, which often structures its intimacies around an address to a "you" that shifts over the course of the poem—is instructive for thinking about how it does so. As the poem proceeds, its "you," if at first indicating a possible address to a general or anonymous "you," increasingly (though never completely or finally) points toward lyric self-address. At first, the questions that open the poem ("[i]s it dirty/does it look dirty"), combined with their direct address to an indefinite you, seem to invite us as readers to inhabit this "you," to imagine ourselves as addressed as intimates. But these inviting questions quickly come to feel rhetorical rather than addressed to us as readers when, in the third and middle stanza, the poem's "you" is given a voice that responds within the poem with questions of its own ("is he really"? and "is it"?). At this point, listening in on the poem's dialogue, we no longer hear the poem's indefinite address as directed exactly toward us. In a certain sense, we no longer *hear* the poem but instead *overhear* it.[105] "Song," in this hinge stanza, could suggest itself as lyric in the sense that Frye contemporaneously characterized the genre in 1957: "preeminently the utterance that is overheard." In Frye's terms, when we apprehend the dialogue that appears in the third stanza of "Song," we might be overhearing the "lyric poet . . . pretend[ing] to be talking to himself or to someone else." Yet, whereas for Frye this dynamic means that "the poet, so to speak, turns his back on his listeners,"[106] O'Hara's song and its vexed address seem still to acknowledge us, his overhearing listeners, even as he perversely indulges in the kind of self-talk that, like the lyric, traditionally indicates a withdrawal from, but in the midst of, the social.

Because the talk that in this moment we become aware we are in some sense *over*hearing is sexual speculation about someone's "very bad character," "Song," here, also presents itself as gossip. Our interest as readers is therefore imagined as an interest in the potential perversities, or dirt, of both lyric and gossip. Once again, O'Hara's scene of poetic gossip about an oddly intimate albeit anonymous "someone" opens onto a provisional self-performance—as if "Song" declares that someone's going to come along with a very bad character, or my name isn't Frank O'Hara. Through this performance, O'Hara engages and seeks to transform the space of lyric by reimagining the speech of lyric self-address as a scene of talky self-gossip, with the traditionally autonomous self-relation of lyric subjectivity—the poet speaking to him- or herself—taking the form of a more unstable self-other relation, sustained by gossiping about "someone." For even as the poem's "you" begins to seems more and more like a lyric "I," its "dirty" mind also takes on the qualities of the poem's gossiped-about "someone," suggesting that the poet is engaged in self-gossip, talking not only to but about himself. The poem's collapsing boundary between exterior and interior, sociality and subjectivity, enables this sexual gossip about a strangely intimate, attractive, and dirty "someone" to become intimately strange self-gossip about a defiantly dirty self—a defiantly dirty *lyric* self, we might ultimately say, whose interiority, character, city, and song are nourished by queer gossip and the shabbiness of knowing so much about others.

4 "The Celestial Salon"

James Merrill and the Afterlife of Gossip

"Buried in Ostensible Chitchat"

> Gossip, though it can be exceedingly interesting when the parties are alive, is not at all interesting when they're dead.
>
> W. H. Auden, *Lectures on Shakespeare*

> Who could ever think—in particular, at this date, what gay man—that someone's death ever stopped the elaboration of someone else's fantasy about him?
>
> D. A. Miller, *Bringing Out Roland Barthes*

Does gossip have an afterlife? The fresh news promised by hot gossip might seem to carry a short expiration date: gossip's critics and proponents alike often remark its occasional, ephemeral, and even disposable qualities—those aspects of everyday talk that, depending on one's perspective, either compare unfavorably to or enable a subversion of the literary, understood, in Ezra Pound's famous formulation, as "news that STAYS news."[1] Yet at a time when "Google's unforgiving memory," Daniel Solove argues, "transform[s] forgettable whispers within small local groups to a widespread and permanent chronicle of people's lives," gossip's news—if "once scattered, forgettable, and localized"—increasingly appears the enduring stuff of history.[2] Perhaps it always has been. Ovid's influential account of gossip imagines the House of Fame, classical goddess of gossip and rumor, as an impossibly totalizing, eternal archive of "every voice and word" ever uttered, while Fame herself, as thoroughly as any search engine's web crawler, "scours the whole wide world" of discourse for "all that goes on in heaven or sea or land."[3] Ovid intimates, pace Auden, that although the subjects and occasions of gossip inevitably pass, talk about them remains indelibly on record, wait-

ing only for its performance to become "exceedingly interesting" again.[4] As no less a theorist of modern dish than Oscar Wilde puts it, "Gossip is charming! History is merely gossip."[5] In this view, our gossip outlives us, becoming history, or, rather, we become historical by living on as gossip. Indeed, insofar as gossip's keen, revivifying attention ensures that no one ever really gossips about the dead, Auden may be right to claim that good gossip dishes only on the living. More than a shift from the literal to the figurative, reinflecting Auden's claim in this way entails a change of emphasis from gossip's transience to our own; it suggests that, instead of asking whether there can be gossip after life, we might better inquire: *Is there life after gossip?*

The sharpest—and strangest—meditation on these questions that I know is James Merrill's *The Changing Light at Sandover*, a sprawling, 560-page poem that takes what can only be called an exceeding interest in (as one reader sees it) "much gossip, often licentious, about the famous dead," to the extent that, for some, the poem seems a veritable "all-night talk show of the dead."[6] *Sandover*—now epic, now dramatic, now lyric in mood—chronicles nearly thirty years of Ouija board conversations between Merrill (JM, in the board's uppercase shorthand), his lover and partner David Jackson (DJ), and an eclectic ensemble of voices from the beyond, including dead friends, literary forebears, familiar spirits, bat-like angels, and a pantheon presided over by God Biology and his sister Mother Nature. Announcing his poem, in its opening pages, as "The Book of a Thousand and One Evenings Spent / With David Jackson at the Ouija Board," Merrill mines the occult qualities of the relationship between literary tradition and individual talent as he channels a queer fantasia on themes as seemingly disparate as nuclear apocalypse, Cold War politics, homosexuality, friendship, reproduction, and poetic self-making.[7] These far-flung threads are woven together by the gossip that both establishes and sustains Merrill's "celestial salon" and proves vital to his poem's attempt to create "some kind of workable relation / Between the two worlds" (100, 20). Thriving on gossip with and about deceased parties, *Sandover* at times appears to be crafting a self-affirming literary genealogy of the gossip, from Plato to Proust and on; and its pedigree of gossip as poetic practice features, somewhat ironically, W. H. Auden (or WHA), who plays this divine comedy's Virgil as a dotty queer uncle guiding his charges in their earnest hounding after juicy bits of revelation.

Though these revelations begin modestly—heavenly anecdotes, the (often comic) workings of reincarnation—they soon broach an extravagantly de-

tailed cosmology. But for all the poem's trappings of cosmic quest, JM and DJ delight most in the everyday pleasures of turning to their first and wittiest familiar, Ephraim, along with various dearly departed, "for an off-the-record gossip," vowing early on "never to forego, in favor of / Plain dull proof, the marvelous nightly pudding" (124, 32). Even as *Sandover*'s later volumes seem to move away from Ephraim's "marvelous," supernatural dish, in favor of the absurdly divine and divinely absurd pedagogy of atomic bats and archangels, JM and DJ cling to Ephraim's camp "tone," at first "trusted not one bit" (17). The two quickly recognize "[h]ow much we'd come to trust him, take as law / His table talk, his backstage gossip," and they consistently revel in its "no-proof rhetoric" (55). No surprise, then, that Merrill's readers have noted, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, the "gaily inflected gossip" of his poem's central figures and the chatty tone and subject matter of verse steeped in "gossip from the beyond" and "social chitchat," largely agreeing that "gossip and ritualized information form much of the poem's surface."[8] Yet responses to this gossipy "surface" have tended to dismiss it as *mere* surface or "more gossip than gospel."[9] Noting gossip's unavoidable presence in Merrill's project, but only in passing, most critics have proceeded as if in tacit agreement not to indulge the poem's idle talk, as if, in this case, what happens in Sandover stays in Sandover.

Those few readers who do find Merrill's dish palatable and substantive enough to address have followed Helen Vendler in first conceiving of the poem's talk not as *gossip* but the broader, and ostensibly more benign, *conversation*.[10] For these readers, conversation—celebrated, however rightly, as a democratic exchange between affectionate equals—lends itself better to ethical claims for the poem's talk as a means of establishing non-violative relationships between self and other.[11] Such claims, familiar to us from the critical reception of Stein's and O'Hara's poetic talk, in fact resonate with the work of theorists who have attempted to recharacterize gossip's primary function as expressing intimacy and affection, rather than conveying trivial matters or maliciously spreading misinformation.[12] But these claims for conversation in Merrill's trilogy, even if adapted to gossip, represent only part of the story: an emphasis on conversation's mutuality obscures on the one hand gossip's potential for asserting hierarchy and normativity and, on the other, the way that gossip, unlike conversation, connotes a potential queerness, a pleasurable, world-making investment in the nonnormative. *Sandover*'s gossip significantly engages this tension between its potential normativity and its potential queerness.

Merrill, accordingly, evinces ambivalence toward his poem becoming more gossip than gospel. In a draft typescript of *Sandover*'s third volume, in a passage cut before publication, he playfully describes efforts to resist the temptations of "an hour of devilish / Tortes of language, sparkling flutes of chat"—a culinary figure for the excess of gossip with eager, gabby ghosts that he feared would increase his poem's girth "each time we surrender / (Between meals as it were) to a rich dish. / The work's already anything but slender."[13] Despite these worries, Merrill and Jackson's Ouija sessions invariably succumb to "rich dish," much of it served up in the first omnibus publication of *Sandover* (1982), which gathers the poem's three installments, each less "slender" than the next—*The Book of Ephraim* (1976), *Mirabell's Books of Number* (1978), and *Scripts for the Pageant* (1980)—and adds a "Coda: The Higher Keys."[14] And *Sandover* was hardly the last word from the other side: Merrill's archive shows that he continued to consult the Ouija for the latest news from this world and the next until as late as just months before his death in early 1995. In addition to these talks, transcribed and preserved for posterity, Merrill publicly revisited the Ouija's world in poems appearing in *Late Settings* (1985) and *A Scattering of Salts* (1995), and in a dramatic adaptation (and eventual film) entitled *Voices from Sandover*.[15] But it is in a 1992 *Paris Review* interview entitled "The Plato Club" and conducted, via the Ouija board, with a gathering of deceased queer writers, that he presents his most outré elaboration of fantasies about the dead. Referenced briefly in *Sandover* as an "Athenian / Club where you can get a drink and read / The underground newspapers" (305), the Plato Club, Jean Genet confirms, "is the gayest in the universe."[16] Certainly there is something perversely buoyant about the ribald gossip that drives the interview's proceedings, even as the spirits, as Gertrude Stein says, "watch & listen with amazement at current political efforts to 'clean up' sex" and worry, as Henry James does, that "stigmata long gone have been re-released in fear of disease" (19, 79). In the course of what are meant to be *Paris Review*–style Q&As about, Merrill explains, "your life as a writer. Shoptalk," Colette insists the emphasis be on "Gossip!" (30, 31). Merrill concludes of her bawdy dish and its emphasis on sex and language, "You're inventing delicious fictions—I hope!—to dramatize their interaction" (33).

This nexus of gossip, sex, and poetic self-making is perhaps most clearly at work when Wallace Stevens attempts to allay Merrill's concerns over the raunchy turn the interview has taken by comparing it with a recalled, or reimagined, *Life* magazine photo shoot. "Think of this assignment as I did when

Life magazine insisted on photographing me in my living room," he suggests. "I cunningly wore a robe over shirt & tie, coat & vest, & when the cameras were set up I was asked to stand near a wall of books. I did, but as the shutter clicked I opened my robe to reveal a considerable erection" (59). When this anecdote meets with considerable disbelief, Stevens explains that "for all of us here the joining of two hands on a cup leaves us quite aroused," intimating the mechanics of the Ouija board and its chorus of dead voices, including his own, "aroused" into chatter by the shared grasp of the living (59). But his comment also, and more immediately, gestures toward the sexual excitement with which these voices respond to Merrill and Jackson's touch and—more to the point—implies the palpable erotics of being in touch with, and giving voice to, gossipy presences from the other world. Stevens's unlikely anecdote reworks a moment of self-presentation as a poet for the pages of *Life* into bawdy sexual gossip for the pages of his living mediums, slyly engaged in their own games of concealment and self-exposure for the *Paris Review*.

Nearly all of Merrill and Jackson's interlocutors in "The Plato Club"—a veritable who's who of queer literature—concoct such "delicious fictions" of sex and style or, as one spirit declares in an unpublished Ouija transcript, "WHAT I'D CALL A RICH LOAD OF GOSSIPY MA~~NURE~~TERIAL + ALL TRUE. WE PREDICT A SENSATION (POSSIBLY TINY LEGAL ACTION BUT NOT FOR YOU!)."[17] This characterization of the interview, like Merrill's favored adjective for the Ouija's dish—"rich"—accentuates gossip's ambiguous literary and cultural (not to mention legal) status: both "MATERIAL" and "MANURE," it is at once a source of nourishing abundance and of self-indulgent waste, both an object of fascinating complexity and one that inspires bemusement or indignation (*it's all a bit rich!*). Staking out his own ambivalent relation to gossip, Merrill admits that "a lot of the talk" in *Sandover* "sounds like badinage, casual if not frivolous," but emphasizes, "something serious is usually going on under the surface."[18] "How many years," he asks in a draft passage from *Sandover*, "[b]efore we learn to dig out meanings that/Lay buried in ostensible chitchat"?[19] Such remarks draw attention to the uncertain threshold between gossip and poetry, that tricky space, neither fully interior nor exterior to poet or poem, in which we find what Merrill calls in *Sandover* "this net of loose talk tightening to verse" (85).

This chapter asserts the significance in *Sandover* of the dialectical tension between "gossip" and "gospel," "loose talk" and "verse." In the private Ouija transcripts and unofficial codas, like "The Plato Club," that follow *Sandover*'s

completion in 1982, Merrill reenvisions the fictive world of *Sandover* and his poetic reputation in the context of anxious AIDS-era discourses about sexuality and the arts, placing renewed insistence on—and faith in—the dense intertwining of gossip, poetry, and sex in the otherworldly voices he and Jackson have aroused. These fantasies about the dead both dig in and dish the dirt, finding buried meanings and new life in *Sandover*'s chitchat. Taking my cue from these postmortems of *Sandover* and the stakes of their sensational performance of gossip, in what follows I reveal the formative interplay between the queer art of gossip and Merrill's poetic practice. My argument presents itself in three movements of two sections each. It begins by establishing how the midcentury sexual suspicions briefly treated in my previous chapter also inflect—productively as much as disastrously—the relationship of lyric privacy to gossipy publicity in *Sandover*. The next two sections develop this problematic of the afterlife of midcentury gossip by examining the ways the Ouija poem's "backstage gossip" challenges the pervasive menace of the gossip-laden, Cold War discourse of the Lavender Scare, which haunts the 1950s origins of Merrill's poem and which would position queerness as a figure for the nonreproductive and antisocial, in part by blurring nuclear and sexual threat. In *Sandover*, I argue, the reproduction of gossip establishes affiliations that recast a postnuclear fear of annihilation in terms of the domestic sphere and a queer, postnuclear family, building a utopian vision of the future out of the unstable economy of queer reproduction central to America's Cold War unease. In validating the practice of gossip his culture deems frivolous, effeminate, and at times threatening, that is, Merrill's poem metonymically invites us to locate the value of a queer world also denigrated as frivolous, effeminate, and threatening—and one in which gossip itself is thought to loom large.

In the chapter's final two sections, I shift from an emphasis on the social dimensions of Merrill's gossip to its formal effects, arguing that his gossipy retelling of the pervasive cultural narrative that equates homosexuality with the dissolution of the social opens onto and in part arises from the aesthetic issue of poetic tone—and thus suggests how the history of the modern lyric intertwines with the history of sexuality examined in the first two movements of this chapter. Promoted especially by the New Criticism, tone—the critical metaphor for a poem's tone of voice, or emotional stance—has long served as a fundamental concept for modern lyric readings and their efforts to designate the fictive interiority implied by a tone of voice. As Langdon Hammer explains, the contemporary question of tone—"a key problem in

American poetry since the 1970s, with both technical and philosophical aspects"—involves not only a formal shift from predominantly metrical to predominantly free verse but also a "historical difference in the confidence with which we understand other people's interiority and communicate our own."[20] This crisis in confidence is a motivating dilemma for Merrill and Jackson's tonally ambiguous Ouija dictations and the poem they engender, and I conclude by addressing how the question of tone, both for Merrill and American poetry and poetics more broadly, is bound up in important ways with the question of gossip, which bears its own stylistic and theoretical concerns with both "other people's interiority" and "our own." As we will see, gossip and what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick identifies as its tools "for making, testing, and using unrationalized and provisional hypotheses about what *kinds of people* there are to be found in one's world" provide *Sandover*'s verse with an opportunity and a method for a provocative sounding of the problem of tone and the queer possibilities, as much as the limits, of lyric interiority.[21]

"NOT THE MOMENT QUITE TO GOSSIP"

In thinking about the relationship between poetry and gossip in *The Changing Light at Sandover*, one could do worse than to begin with a formidable occasion for both: the poetry reading. Merrill's poem ends with a poetry reading; in the coda's final scene, we find JM about to deliver *his* poem, the making of which has been documented by *Sandover*, to "SOME / FANS OF YOURS IN HEAVEN, A SMALL CROWD" who, Ephraim shares, "HAD HOPED TO HEAR THE POEM READ ALOUD" (540).[22] The opening of JM's poem—"I begin: 'Admittedly . . .'" (560)—at once concludes Merrill's poem and returns us to its first lines: "Admittedly I err by undertaking/This in its present form" (3). *Sandover* thus begins with JM's confessional "I," speaking, after a failed attempt to craft a novel out of the Ouija's polyphonic material, from a traditionally lyrical position of "SOLITUDE" ("I alone was left/To tell my story"), and ends by repeating the same broadly lyrical note (137, 4). Nonetheless, although critics have emphasized the poem's many embedded lyrics and credibly argued for *Ephraim* as a lyric sequence, no one could reasonably claim that the 557 pages of *Sandover* that intervene between these two lyrical admissions constitute a lyric poem. Rather, the poem's framing subjectivity, in presenting itself as conventionally lyrical, takes a stance that not only sets out in error, but knowingly "err[s]," or wanders, through the multivoiced, multigeneric trilogy and its coda. My point in what follows, then, is not to read *Sandover* as lyric but as *about* (among many

other things, to be sure) the idea of lyric, and to examine how notions of the lyric go astray in *Sandover*, how its loose talk consistently gossips about the normative limits and queer potentials of the genre, and especially of its putative interiority.

The final scene's invitation-only reading takes place at the eponymous Sandover—the "*noble rosebrick manor*" in which most of the poem's virtual action occurs—in the ornate ballroom where "26 CHAIRS" arranged for the event accommodate almost an alphabet ("SOME DOUBLINGS MAKE FOR GAPS") of deceased luminaries ranging from Jane Austen to W. B. Yeats (319, 547). In the moments before the reading, as Dante switches seats with Proust and Colette swaps looks with Maya Deren, JM stands apart, only to have his thoughts interrupted by a young T. S. Eliot. "I feel," JM says,

> forgotten. Friends are letting me
> Compose myself in tactful privacy
> When what I need—ha! a young man in gray
> Three-piece pinstripe suit has veered my way,
> Smiling pleasantly: NOT THE MOMENT QUITE
> TO GOSSIP BUT THERE'S ONE THING YOU SHOULD KNOW.
> THESE WORKS, YOU UNDERSTAND? THAT OTHERS 'WRITE'
> (It's Eliot, he's thinking of Rimbaud)
> ARE YET ONE'S OWN (557–558)

Sandover's concluding scene positions Merrill's alter ego, JM, as celestial poet laureate, literally "compos[ing]" himself in an act of poetic self-making that is certainly brash and seemingly lyric: here this self-composition specifically occupies, at least initially, what we might think of as the "tactful privacy" of traditional lyric solitude. Yet the privacy and decorum of such lyric self-creation is interrupted soon enough by gossip's invasion of privacy and delicious breach of tact. If "poetry," as John Stuart Mill writes, "is the natural fruit of solitude and meditation; eloquence, of intercourse with the world," in these lines Merrill imagines a liminal encounter between poetry and eloquence, solitude and the world—lyric and "GOSSIP."[23] Using the scene of the poetry reading, where lyric solitude theatrically enters public circulation, he dramatizes—and revalues—tensions a Mill-based tradition of lyric finds implicit in poetry itself, which, though often "a soliloquy in full dress, and on the stage," must still perform its privacy for an assumed, but unacknowledged, audience's consumption.[24]

This moment indeed seems to riff on Northrop Frye's version of Mill's

figure for the lyric poet, who, "so to speak, turns his back on his listeners."[25] Eliot's interruption of JM's "tactful privacy" hence may seem, as if tapping on the studiously turned shoulder of the poet, tactlessly to disrupt lyric solitude. Eliot commences his dish, after all, by announcing that it should not now commence: "NOT THE MOMENT QUITE / TO GOSSIP BUT. . . ." But of course, in depicting Eliot saying what he should really not now be saying, Merrill portrays him prefacing his comments with gossip's rhetorical trope par excellence, paralipsis, and seizing quite the right moment for gossip, which can depend in no small part on the seeming inappropriateness of its occasion for effect. And rather than frustrating the authorial resources of lyric privacy, this welcome bit of gossip is, JM seems to be on the verge of asserting, what he in fact "need[s]" to compose himself. Just as gossip's paralipsis manages very well to emphasize what it ostensibly passes over, its talk about others, often too the passing on of others' talk, self-contradictorily serves to perform the authority that it also seems to shrug off or efface. Gossip in this sense becomes a way of telling one's own story by telling someone else's, and Eliot's coy gossip—and, even more, JM's retelling of it—presents an exemplary instance of how *Sandover* approaches gossip as such a mode of aesthetic self-fashioning.

Throughout the poem, however, Eliot has exemplified rather the opposite of self-creation: *The Waste Land*, we have previously learned, was largely ghostwritten by the spirit of Arthur Rimbaud, using an unaware Eliot as a medium. "WE HAD TO APPOINT RIMBAUD HE WROTE / THE WASTE LAND WE FED IT INTO THE LIKE-CLONED ELIOT," explains Mirabell, the fallen bat-angel who, as namesake of William Congreve's comic hero, orchestrates with appropriate élan the lessons that fill the poem's second volume (219). JM's incredulous response—"Rimbaud ghostwrote 'The Waste Land'? You are *something*"—betrays recurring doubts about the authorship of his own "WORK GUIDED BY HIGHER COLLABORATION," for which Eliot's multivocal monument has been evoked by the spirits as a reassuring precursor (217, 162).[26] In addition to its unhistorical claims about Eliot, *Sandover* cites as precedent an occult tradition including Victor Hugo's transcribed conversations with the spirit world and the experiments in automatic writing conducted by W. B. Yeats and his wife George, as well as the visionary poetry of Dante, John Milton, and William Blake. But despite the illustrious company Merrill's divine dictations keep, JM deems the poetry in which they result "maddening—it's all by someone else!" (261).[27] And whatever reassurance Eliot's specific example offers falters when even his minor contribu-

tions to *The Waste Land* are pitched as a gag about the uncertain parts of self and other, personal and impersonal in poetic production: "TSE / RESISTING THE FOSTER CHILD, ADDED TOUCHES OF HIS OWN: / THE SUBJECTIVE CORRELATIVE," Mirabell jokes (219).

Even worse, the embarrassing spiritual and physical mechanics of Merrill and Jackson's homemade Ouija board and the upside-down teacup that serves as a planchette make unavoidable both the seeming passivity of its mediums and the challenge posed by other voices to the agency of the poet: at least, as JM observes, "Eliot thought he thought his poem up; / It wasn't spelt out for him by a cup" (219). As the Ouija's compositional method foregrounds the collaborative, perhaps even determinative, forces—ranging from literary tradition to the unconscious to language itself—at play in *all* poetic production, JM finds it difficult to disavow these forces or entertain in any simple way the "thought he thought his poem up." Having been informed, as he recalls in *Mirabell*, that "THE WEORK FINISHT IS BUT A PROLOGUE," and "3 OF YOUR YEARES MORE WE WANT" (113), he eventually confesses:

> I'd set my whole heart, after *Ephraim*, on returning
> To private life, to my own words. Instead,
> Here I go again, a vehicle
> In this cosmic carpool. Mirabell once said
> He taps my word banks. I'd be happier
> If *I* were tapping them. Or thought I were. (261–262)

Depicting his poem as a collaborative trip in an unhappy "carpool" rather than a felicitous, solitary trek into one's own "private life," and as a reduction of the autonomous poet to a mere lexical "vehicle" for table-tapping spirits both literal and figurative, JM here both shatters and indulges the ideal of lyric subjectivity implicit in a phrase like "my own words." It is *Sandover*'s charged relation to this ideal that is at issue when Eliot at last appears, several hundred pages later and "[s]miling pleasantly," to provide the punch line for the poem's significant running joke about the difference between solitary and collaborative authorship, the seeming agency of the poet and the seeming passivity of the medium, and the headings of lyric and gossip that have quietly organized these concerns, among others, throughout the poem.

In keeping with a work that takes the Ouija board's "YES & NO" as motto and adopts as a formal and philosophical principle the notion that "anything worth having's had both ways," Merrill's final scene represents Eliot's gossip,

interpolated into a moment of lyrical self-composition, as neither neatly reconciling poetry and idle talk nor acceding to the binary thinking that would make of them an either/or proposition (174). Insinuating that Rimbaud's authorship of *The Waste Land* is less certain than Mirabell's dish would have it, Eliot declares his poetic authority but does so via gossip. The rhetoric of gossip allows him paradoxically to assert his own voice almost entirely in a voice not his own, disclosing his authorship through unattributed talk of "THESE WORKS . . . THAT OTHERS 'WRITE.' " By repeating and fleshing out Eliot's counter-gossip about Rimbaud, JM in turn (and, at still another remove, Merrill) tacitly affirms that the poem we might variously understand to have been written by "OTHERS" is "YET"—nevertheless? still? or at some future point may be?—his "OWN." The audience for JM's poetry reading has also been promised gossip, "SALON / AFTER SALON LEFT BREATHLESS BY . . . SLY / HINTING AT 'REVELATIONS,' " and in this anticipatory moment—not quite yet the moment for the poetry or gossip with which it is imbued—JM's lyric self-composition "need[s]" Eliot's intruding voice and its gossip about "THESE WORKS," just as Eliot's particular bid for poetic authority depends on the recirculation of gossip and its strategies of innuendo ("YOU UNDERSTAND?") (540). As Merrill presents them, these are poetic claims less against gossip than *through* gossip.

Such claims carry a particularly queer resonance, both within the world of Merrill's poem and in the 1950s cultural context in which it originates. Inhabiting the unsettled space between lyric discretion and gossipy disclosure in the exchange between JM and Eliot, and in *Sandover*'s final scene more generally, Merrill emphasizes a set of productive tensions that strikingly meet throughout his queer *Künstlerroman* and its quasi-autobiographical account of JM's self-composition. The poetry reading with which the poem closes pointedly mingles poetic and sexual self-fashioning when, in the buildup to it, we learn that Ephraim will "BRING IN . . . OUR POET"—appropriately so, JM notes in a flourish of self-gossip, "[h]aving long since brought him out" (547). Sexual and poetic identities are seen here as complementary: the poetic achievement of *Sandover* and the poem's frank celebration of homosexuality and a queer literary tradition, both "brought . . . out" by Ephraim over the course of the poem and the postwar decades it chronicles, together enable him now to "BRING IN . . . OUR POET."

In connecting sexual and poetic identities, *Sandover* demonstrates the Cold War influence of the early 1950s, when—as narrated in *Ephraim*—Merrill and Jackson began both their relationship with each other and the

Ouija sessions out of which the poem would eventually develop. As we have seen in the previous chapter's discussion of Frank O'Hara, these were years marked by suspicions that the arts were being taken over by a far-reaching homosexual network, an alleged "Homintern" paralleling the Comintern, or Communist International, supposedly running rampant in the State Department.[28] John D'Emilio delineates how in the cultural imagination of the era, "homosexuality became an epidemic infesting the nation, actively spread by Communists to sap the strength of the next generation," a logic that carried over into the arts, where—as Michael S. Sherry writes—"anxious observers depicted gay artists as psychologically and creatively inauthentic," effeminate figures who "undermined the nation's cultural prowess."[29] According to Gavin Butt, in the postwar period persistent rumors about the significant gay presence in the arts caused "artistic identity *itself*" to become "phobically charged with queerness."[30] The male artist, especially, "though no self-evident figure of homosexuality, as a result of phobic suspicions, paranoias, and rumors, becomes a kind of sexually *liminal* figure."[31] Merrill similarly indicates this perceived queerness of the artist, and specifically the poet, in his 1993 memoir *A Different Person*, writing that "thirty years ago a gay idiom . . . served as a deshabille to be slipped into behind closed doors. In this it resembled shoptalk" (649). From this perspective queer sexuality, poetry, and the gossip that blurs them occasion, as much as the Ouija board, what sometimes seems in *Sandover* a crisis of agency—each inviting, in its own way, an alien element into the domestic circle, and each courting cultural connotations of passivity, feminized weakness, and inauthenticity that ensure JM risks becoming, whether in fact or in a prejudicial midcentury point of view, what he calls in *Ephraim* a "medium / Blankly uttering someone else's threat" (65).

These risks, however, also engender possibilities in *Sandover*: the poem's Ouija-board gossip holds out a queer promise equal to the threat of taking on "someone else's" voice, encouraging JM's self-described efforts to become "sufficiently / Imbued with otherness" (89). Like the gossip about "THESE WORKS . . . THAT OTHERS 'WRITE,' " which facilitates their becoming "YET ONE'S OWN" and, like the sexual speculation of being "brought . . . out," which allows the "POET" to be brought in, becoming a "medium" for free-floating talk provides access to what Merrill calls a "self . . . much stranger and freer and more farseeing than the one you thought you knew."[32] If to be an artist in midcentury America "was to occupy a subject position criss-crossed with sexual ambiguity" and "constantly shadowed by queer

meaning," the reparative recirculation of the gossipy sexual suspicion attached to the arts and the figure of the artist thus offered a potential form of queer self-fashioning in a hostile climate, drawing on the strategies of gossip to intimate, enact, and enjoy queerness without ever undeniably disclosing it.[33] As Butt explains, "The artistic life, so to speak, could be experienced as a specifically queer form of existence and the figure of the artist him/herself a specifically queer form of embodiment."[34]

Whether embodied or disavowed, such forms of queerness are only accentuated for the postwar male poet, at work in a genre still marked by a masculinist modernist revolt against the supposed effeminacy of Victorian verse and a feminized literary culture, and in a genre especially valued at the time for its stylized performance of privacy, ambiguity, and paradox—or for its transgressive refusal of these New Critical imperatives. "From the age of nineteen," Merrill writes in *A Different Person*, "I've been made to feel . . . my difference from the rest of the world, a difference laudable and literary at noon, shocking and sexual at midnight—though surely from the beginning my nights were part of the same vital process as my days" (650). Merrill's notebooks from the 1950s bear traces of this "vital process" and the historical backdrop against which *Sandover* turns to gossip to reimagine a "laudable" lyric privacy as a "shocking" mode of queer publicity. An obscure poem entitled "Publicity," neatly copied out by Merrill "From Daniel George's Notebooks" and into his own, comically flirts with the fraught association between poetic identity and queerness:

> A friend of mine (well, not a friend:
> I've only met him once or twice
> But he amuses me no end)
> Has taken up unnatural vice.
>
> Of course, it doesn't worry me
> (I've never been with him alone),
> But since his line is poetry
> I rather think he wants it known.[35]

It is not difficult to see why Merrill, specifically, would be attracted to this poem's manner and subject—its witty formal elegance, light conversational tone, punning, and correcting and qualifying registers of voice take glee in smudging the "line" distinguishing privacy and publicity, poetry and perversion. As the "unnatural vice" assumed to be homosexuality is revealed (or is

it?) as "poetry" and a presumed wish for discretion is revealed as a desire for disclosure, what seems gossip about "a friend" advances as well (especially in its parenthetical admissions and denials) as a queer performance of the self. The poem's "I" speaks about, on behalf of, and *as* a poet, and in each case this figure is indeed "criss-crossed with sexual ambiguity," his verse a vice "constantly shadowed by queer meaning" and vice versa. Is the speaker's "friend" queer or a poet? The final line's ambiguous "it" allows for, even invites, both interpretations. Ultimately, however, the poem's joke—much like that of Eliot's cameo appearance in *Sandover*—suggests the perversity of publicizing poetry, a perversity inherent, and disavowed, in Mill's ideal of the lyric as a public performance of privacy, one that "know[s] that other eyes are upon us" but must somehow admit "no trace of consciousness that any eyes are upon us."[36] Whereas Mill insists that "there is nothing absurd in the idea of such a mode of soliloquizing," "Publicity" revels in the queerness of this definitional absurdity, turning to gossip to playfully tease out its erotics. When Merrill carefully transcribed the poem in 1953, its location of something delightfully illicit in the paradox of lyric practice must have seemed to him both appealing and apt.

"YOU COULD BE AS POETS AND YOU WANT SCANDAL"

Dated November 14 of that same year, 1953—significantly the year Merrill received his first Ouija board as a gift and the year he met Jackson—Merrill and Jackson's earliest surviving and possibly first Ouija transcript also takes up the relationship between poetry and publicity. This brief, initial transcript in fact introduces many of what will become *Sandover*'s central preoccupations. Already Merrill and Jackson begin to construct a queer poetic genealogy, contacting Walt Whitman, "YOUR GREAT POET SINGING SONGS," who urges, "DO NOT O DO NOT O CHILDREN BELIEVE IN SHAME," and Sappho, who declares, "WE THAT SING ARE ONE." Addressing the uncertain authorial agency of the poet and the medium, they ask Sappho, "You *are* people living and writing?" She confirms, "THERE IS A CHANNEL TO EACH." And as if foreseeing their taste, in *Sandover*, for Ephraim's "marvelous nightly pudding," Merrill and Jackson seek dish, though the spirits admonish them, "THAT IS VERY ODD. YOU COULD BE AS POETS AND YOU WANT SCANDAL."[37] Yet poetry and scandal, as "Publicity" posits and as the culture surrounding Merrill would have affirmed, are scarcely distinct modes; and when Whitman's ghost ambiguously refers to a poem "ONCE WRITTEN AND THEN BURNED," this first transcript also introduces one of the central

motifs—that of the incriminating manuscript and the potential gossip it scandalously signifies—around which Merrill organizes *Sandover*'s queer meditation on poetry and publicity.

One source for this motif, from Merrill's own life, appears in *A Different Person*, where he writes of the anxiety his sexuality caused his mother, spurring her "efforts to make me into a different person." These efforts "had led her to open letters not addressed to her, to consult lawyers and doctors—behavior that appalled her even as she confessed it. Her latest move, however"—preemptively destroying, under the flimsy guise of a misunderstanding, Merrill's friends' and lovers' correspondence while he was living in Europe in 1951—"I found hard to forgive" (537). Merrill understood her action as motivated by

> a single mean-spirited fear. Publicity would render you unemployable, a "security risk." Your former partners would come forward, with letters and so forth as evidence, to blackmail you. With so many "mysterious young men" in the picture—my mother's case went—those "awful" letters could vanish overnight, and I would live under the "threat of exposure" for the rest of my days. (537)

This passage presents the Cold War institutional language surrounding a perceived homosexual menace—"[p]ublicity," "security risk," "blackmail," "threat of exposure"—drifting in and out of direct and free-indirect discourse and confusing the private, personal talk of the family sphere and the impersonal public statements of those government agencies that would vehemently claim to protect it. Merrill's "mother's case" echoes, for example, the argument advanced most notably by Senator Joseph McCarthy, who declared in a 1950 article in the *New York Times* that "perverts were officially considered to be security risks because they were 'subject to blackmail.' "[38] A 1950 Senate report entitled *Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government* likewise contends, as D'Emilio summarizes it:

> "The social stigma attached to sex perversion" was so great that detection could ruin an individual for life. "Gangs of blackmailers," the report continued, took advantage of this vulnerability by making "a regular practice of preying upon the homosexual." Espionage agents "can use the same type of pressure to extort confidential information." . . . [Homosexuals] would betray their country, the committee asserted, rather than live with the consequences of exposure.[39]

This national "hunt for homosexuals and lesbians extended far beyond a search for those in the military and the federal bureaucracy," as the "obses-

sive concern with national security spurred the growth of an immense system of tests and standards to determine the suitability of employees."[40] Thus, parroting what Merrill calls postwar "arguments . . . against sexual or political irregularity" (537), his mother becomes in the memoir a kind of "medium / Blankly uttering someone else's threat." Yet her fear of this threat was not wholly blank. Though he does not mention it in his memoir, Merrill's unpublished correspondence from the time more fully elaborates the circumstances that led to his letters' destruction, explaining in a letter to William Meredith that his New York "apartment was broken into and curiously enough, left untouched as far as objects and jewelry are concerned. My mother thought up another interpretation, which might well be accurate, and after various misunderstandings presumed to go there herself . . . for the purpose of burning all the loose papers she could find."[41]

This account of the ominous break-in and subsequently burned letters prefigures—and helps illuminate—the passage in which JM, in the final section of *Ephraim* (Z, in the volume's abecedarian arrangement), contemplates burning the transcripts of his and DJ's séances, figured as "old love-letters from the other world" (87). In the previous section, the pair has made contact with W. H. Auden's ghost ("Wystan had just died") for the first time, and though "pleased with his NEW PROLE BODY" and comparing "Heaven to A NEW MACHINE," Auden's most immediate concern could be described as the "threat of exposure," a threat that, in the memoir's belated light, seems even more clearly bound up with sexuality:

> a gust of mortal anxiety
> Blew, his speech guttered, there were papers YES
> A BOX in Oxford that must QUICKLY BE
> QUICKLY BURNED—(87)[42]

Auden's stubborn "mortal anxiety"—in addition to assuming a keen public interest in gossip about the dead—provokes JM to recollect his first contact with Ephraim, last incarnate as a first-century Greek Jew in the debauched court of Tiberius and "throttled / by the imperial guard for having LOVED / THE MONSTERS NEPHEW (sic) CALIGULA" (8). For Ephraim, too, has insisted that

> A long incriminating manuscript
> Boxed in bronze lay UNDER PORPHYRY
> Beneath the deepest excavations. He

Would help us find it, but we must please make haste
Because Tiberius wanted it destroyed. (8)

To this pattern of "incriminating manuscript[s]" that must be "destroyed" ("Wystan had merged / Briefly with Tiberius, that first night, / Urging destruction of a manuscript"), JM adds his and DJ's Ouija notebooks:

in the final
Analysis, who didn't have at heart
Both a buried book and a voice that said
Destroy it? How sensible had *we* been
To dig up this material of ours? (87)

JM and DJ's "material," however embarrassing, might appear less obviously sexually "incriminating" than Auden's or Tiberius's manuscripts.[43] Soon though, in a passage that seems both to draw on the incident detailed in Merrill's memoir and to anticipate that account's language, JM finds the Stonington home he shares with DJ broken into and—just like Merrill's New York apartment in 1951—"curiously enough left untouched as far as objects and jewelry are concerned" ("We had no television, he no taste / For Siamese bronze or Greek embroidery," quips JM) (90). The mysterious "thief" inexplicably takes nothing but amplifies JM's doubts about the "threat" posed by "this material of ours":

The threat remains, though, of there still being
A presence in our midst, unknown, unseen,
Unscrupulous to take what he can get.
Next morning in my study—stranger yet—
I found a dusty carton out of place.
Had it been rummaged through? What could he fancy
Lay buried here among these—oh my dear,
Letters scrawled by my own hand unable
To keep pace with the tempest in the cup—
These old love-letters from the other world.
We've set them down at last beside the fire.
Are they for burning, now that the affair
Has ended? (Has it ended?) (91)

At a mythic level, "this particular thief in the night" is, as Stephen Yenser observes, "reminiscent of both the Troubler in the Garden and Hermes, pa-

tron of thieves."[44] But Merrill's "burglar here in the Enchanted Village" (90) also manifests historical fears of "sexual or political irregularity" that clarify the mystery of his overdetermined "threat." Imagining the Ouija transcripts as "old love-letters" that provide evidence of JM and DJ's "affair" with an "other world" that is as much queer demimonde as *au-delà*, suggesting that the house has been broken into by an "[u]nscrupulous" figure whose "threat remains" as long as these letters do—Merrill, here, recasts his mother's burning of his friends' and lovers' correspondence as part of *Sandover*'s occult drama, the resulting palimpsest charged, "at heart," by the burned material beneath its surface and the "voice that said / Destroy it."

In *Sandover*, JM does not burn the transcripts: "Let that carton be," he concludes. "Too much / Already, here below, has met its match" (92). And neither has "the affair . . . ended": by the time these lines appeared in print, Merrill and Jackson were well into the intense Ouija sessions documented in *Mirabell* and the spiritual lessons that, as we will see, make *Sandover*'s most insistent case for a privileged relationship between homosexuality and poetry. Indeed, throughout *Sandover* Merrill contrasts the fictional Auden's anxious impulse toward destruction with his own inclination to preserve.[45] In part, Merrill frames this contrast as a conversation about the stakes, both personal and literary, of preserving embarrassing or even potentially damaging queer experience. Yet Merrill also sees the contrast as a conversation about the stakes of pursuing, and preserving, an embarrassing queer *poetics*, one invested in both the representation of nonnormative sexual experience and the minor aesthetic modes such as gossip—so often dismissed as trivial, failed, or fleeting—associated with queer expression. In *Mirabell*, when JM remarks of Auden's flamboyant and at times flippant afterlife output, "These posthumous ephemera, Lord knows, / Will keep your fans and critics on their toes," Auden characteristically insists, "BURN THESE!" (246). And with the whole of *Sandover* nearing publication, Auden, in a 1982 Ouija transcript, implores, "NOTHING OF A POET'S BUT HIS OWN CONSIDERED BEST EFFORTS SHD SURVIVE HIM. SO WE COME TO THE POINT: THE TRANSCRIPTS. B U R N." When Merrill demurs, "We'd felt we were meant to preserve them to 'verify our experience,'" Auden persists: "THEN LEAVE STRICT INSTRUCTIONS: NOT A LINE REPRINTED. WHY? BECAUSE MISTAKES ENTERED IN + YR EXCELLENT JUDGMENT SIFTED THEM OUT. YET THE AVID GROUPIE WILL TAKE IT ON HIMSELF TO IN EFFECT SOW CONFUSION SIMPLY TO BE IN THE RAY OF LIGHT." "I *see*," says Merrill. "I quite agree!"[46] Yet, as we have seen, this is not the first time Auden's ghost com-

pels JM and DJ to consider burning the Ouija transcripts nor the first time they refuse: despite Auden's warnings against "THE AVID GROUPIE" in search of fifteen minutes of critical fame, Merrill arranged for his and Jackson's Ouija sessions to be preserved in his archives at Washington University (and, just as Merrill himself "reprinted" excerpts from these transcripts in post-*Sandover* poems, scholars have drawn on them in print).

Instead of burning his queer manuscript, Merrill instead rewrites personal history, letting the "threat" remain and allowing the raw "material" of the Lavender Scare's malicious gossip and its "exposure" to become a source for the celebratory, overtly queer poetic gossip of *Sandover*'s "celestial salon." In preserving his "love-letters from the other world"—and, implicitly, the poem based on them—JM does not valorize their privacy or privatize their erotics, but instead perversely fans the flames of their ardent desire in verse. "To my surprise, all burn / To read more of this poem," JM writes (72). In heaven's hierarchy, he has learned, all publicity is good publicity, as "[p]ower . . . kicks upstairs those who possess it, / The good and bad alike": "CALL IT THE HELIUM OF PUBLICITY," Ephraim says (54). One might "rather think," recalling "Publicity," that faced with the "threat of exposure" JM "wants it known," giving the spirits' early words to Jackson and Merrill—"YOU COULD BE AS POETS AND YOU WANT SCANDAL"—more ambiguous intonation and a quality as prophetic as admonitory.

Whatever pleasures *Sandover* takes in the "Publicity" of gossip's "no-proof rhetoric" rest uneasily next to the lingering menace of the McCarthy era's version of such rhetoric and the kind of "[p]ublicity" that "would render you . . . a 'security risk.'" As I have been arguing, the naming names of that malevolent use of gossip contributes to the poem a disquiet—sometimes campy, often not—still palpable after, as JM says, "those twenty / Years in a cool dark place that *Ephraim* took / In order to be palatable wine" (261). I would not want to suggest that this disquiet tidily explains "those twenty / Years" between Merrill and Jackson's first contacts with the other world and the successful transformation of their experience into poetry.[47] But the question of this gap—temporal, historical, biographical, affective, political, aesthetic?—and the poem that seeks to bridge it remains an important one. Certainly it is a question posed by *Sandover* itself and the voices that demand, "WHAT HAS IN FACT BEEN / 25 YEARS IN PREPARATION WE FIRST CALLD U THEN NOW / U ARE READY" (127). Throughout *Sandover*, and especially in *Ephraim*, Merrill calls attention to "THEN" and "NOW," the period of the poem's origins—the 1950s, with its postwar fears of Com-

munists, perverts, and what, for the public, often amounted to the same thing, artists—as well as that of its composition during the post-Stonewall, liberationist 1970s. Emerging from and intermingling these contexts, Merrill's poem stages the tension between gossip as an exercise of power, fueled by paranoia and normativity, and gossip as a more intimately pleasure-driven, queer world-making resource.

It thus may be tempting to conclude that in *Sandover* Merrill uses gossip to enact a shift from the phobic figuration of homosexuality associated with the poem's originary context and toward a burgeoning, alternate figuration of homosexuality, which we might locate more readily in the context of the poem's composition in the mid- to late 1970s. Such a story would make of *Sandover* a personal, poetic, and historical coming-out narrative, hinging on a celebrated, if somewhat specious, dividing line between pre- and post-Stonewall queer life. There is undoubtedly something to this story, especially insofar as it resonates with persuasive critical accounts of the gradual—and linked—stylistic and thematic uncloseting of Merrill's verse. As Vendler argues, "Secrecy and obliquity were Merrill's worst obstacles in his early verses; though his tone was usually clear, the occasion of the tone was impossibly veiled"; more recently, Piotr Gwiazda writes that Merrill "always made his homosexuality an open secret in his poetry—with the emphasis shifting from *secret* to *open* in the course of his fifty-year career."[48] Merrill himself observes, in concluding the incident of the burned letters in *A Different Person*, "It never occurred to the alarmists that a person who made no secret of his life was a sorry target for blackmail. The discretion my mother urged was the *sine qua non* for the scandal she dreaded. But so fine a point eluded me at the time" (537).

Twenty-five years on, *Sandover* grasps this point not by doing away with an outmoded "discretion" or by allowing for a defused "scandal," but by taking up and even exploiting the necessary relation between, in this case, lyric privacy and gossipy publicity as a means of recognition and pleasure, rather than disavowal and dread. This dynamic suggests that instead of understanding the gap between the Ouija's first revelations and *Sandover*'s composition as signifying only or even primarily a lack or need in Merrill's past, we should consider also what role the transcripts—and the queer experience and forms of gossip to which they testify—fulfill for him and his poem in the moment of its making. What would it mean to "conceive of the work of historical affirmation not, as it is often presented, as a lifeline thrown to those figures drowning in the bad gay past, but rather," as Heather Love

observes, "as a means of securing a more stable and positive identity in the present"?[49] What possibilities—aesthetic, philosophical, political—does Merrill seek in the pre-Stonewall origins of his poem? What meanings lay buried in the Ouija's ostensible chitchat? Such questions recommend a closer look at how, within the midcentury gossip buffeting, often disastrously, about the figure of the homosexual, *Sandover* finds viable queer self- and world-making strategies—strategies that enable Merrill to perform the many and varied texts that others write, while making them yet his own.

"MEANINGS YOU CANNOT CONCEIVE"

Of the texts JM and DJ are tasked to perform, none imposes itself more thoroughly than the spirits' extended discourse against the Cold War's nuclear threat. Indeed, in a study of this threat's treatment in contemporary American poetry, John Gery contends that "no better evidence of the extent to which a nuclear awareness has permeated American letters exists than *The Changing Light at Sandover*."[50] Gery's assessment reflects the critical consensus regarding *Sandover*'s impetus; the poem's installments, as Judith Moffett writes, "all were originally undertaken as a warning against nuclear disaster."[51] Ephraim sounds this warning early on: when JM and DJ visit New Mexico, he denounces "the nearby nuclear research," claiming, "THE AIR / ABOVE LOS ALAMOS IS LIKE A BREATH / SUCKED IN HORROR TOD MORT MUERTE DEATH" (33), and even before the global "HORROR" of his "BREATH" / "DEATH" couplet's suffocating rhyme insinuates itself in *Sandover*, we learn in Merrill's poem "The Will"—included, like *Ephraim*, in *Divine Comedies*—that Ephraim impatiently insists that JM "SET MY TEACHING DOWN" or "YOUR WORLD WILL BE UNDONE / & HEAVEN ITSELF TURN TO ONE GRINNING SKULL."[52] Nuclear dread reappears in *Ephraim*'s section P (on power), which pictures "the doomsday clock" of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* edging, in 1970, "[m]inutes nearer midnight. On which stroke / Powers at the heart of matter," JM imagines, "Will open baleful, sweeping eyes, draw breath / And speak new formulae of megadeath," an atomic threat whose unprecedented finality Ephraim chillingly confirms—"News that brought into play our deepest fears" (54, 55). When Mirabell revisits this "frightful hour" of revelation in the poem's next volume, he poses a question that looms over *Sandover*: "FACED WITH NUCLEAR DISASTER, HOW / IS MAN NOT TO DESPAIR?" (183).

Merrill's readers have demonstrated the centrality of this question of nuclear despair to his poem, their criticism attesting to the productive array

of answers it provokes. Scholarship on *Sandover* has yet to adequately consider, however, how this question might be distinctly freighted for a gay man who had come of age during the McCarthy era, a time when the nebulous threat of "NUCLEAR DISASTER" often took shape in the national imagination in two linked figures: the Communist and the queer. While Catherine Davies generally suggests how "Merrill's apocalyptic obsession might be seen to resonate with *Sandover*'s preoccupation with childlessness," her emphasis on Merrill's own, individual "anxieties" about "genetic mortality" casts this resonance in personal terms and does not address the *cultural* anxieties surrounding homosexuality as a perceived threat—an external, phobic figuration of the homosexual with which, I argue, Merrill's poem significantly contends.[53] In an essay on AIDS and the rhetorics of nuclear and sexual apocalypse, Peter Coviello more usefully adduces *Sandover* as a striking example of just "how intimately bonded the nuclear and the sexual actually were, *before* the advent of AIDS gave to such bonding a ghastly quality of inevitability."[54] In line with this observation, I want to suggest that it is "no accident"—to borrow one of the bat-angels' basic principles[55]—that in *Mirabell*, the volume most fully articulating atomic threat, we also find *Sandover*'s most explicit theorization (and celebration) of homosexuality.

Numerous histories of sexuality in postwar America examine what Elaine Tyler May calls "the powerful symbolic force of gender and sexuality in the cold war ideology and culture," showing how "it was not just nuclear energy that had to be contained, but the social and sexual fallout of the atomic age itself."[56] According to Lee Edelman, during "a time of unprecedented concern about the possibility of national—and global—destruction," the "historical pressure upon the postwar American national self-image found displaced articulation in the phobic positioning of homosexual activity as the proximate cause of perceived danger to the nation."[57] Homosexual relationships, characterized as sterile and nonreproductive, left the queer with seemingly no investment in a national future. The "death and anomie associated . . . with the modern homosexual resonated with national concerns in the wake of a world war and the unleashing of the atomic bomb," writes Miriam Reumann. "In a culture focused on rebuilding a normative society and celebrating fecundity, what would be more threatening than sterility?"[58] When the concept of queer reproduction was entertained, it was in terms of dangerously weak, effeminate artistic output that would damage the nation or, worse, in terms of the queer spy's gossip, in a kind of updating of the World War II slogan equating idle talk, perverse sexuality, and national threat: *loose*

lips sink ships.[59] As Valerie Rohy argues, "Tropes of homosexual sterility mask a fear of . . . *homosexual reproduction*," a cultural logic—still with us—in which "homosexuality not only refuses normative reproduction but also constitutes an unnatural *form of reproduction*."[60] Thus, as intense national concern in the postwar period centered on the domestic security of both the nuclear family and the nuclear state, the homosexual—scapegoated at once as a figure of moribund non-generativity *and* deathly fecundity—emerged as a *nuclear* threat, representing a menace both to the nation and normative domesticity.

Recognizing the line yoking *Sandover*'s engagement with Cold War fears of nuclear destruction to its homosexual thematics does more than simply connect historical dots—although that, too, gives us a sharper picture of Merrill's poem. More importantly, understanding this intimate link between the nuclear and the sexual brings into relief the postwar rhetorics of gossip whose afterlife helps Merrill to construct, circulate, and mediate among the poem's competing figurations of queerness. The work of the poem itself is described, as Devin Johnston points out, in "rhetoric reminiscent of the Cold War."[61] Within the complicated system of Sandover the term "V Work"—used by the spirits "WHEN NAMING WORK GUIDED," like JM's poem, "BY HIGHER COLLABORATION"—immediately refers to the "THE 5" souls of Akhnaton, Homer, Montezuma, Nefertiti, and Plato, reborn throughout history to combat apocalypse (162, 143). It might seem fitting, then, that "V Work" also connotes the Second World War's victory and its aftermath, as well as "'LIFE' IN OUR SALON TONGUE" (the French *vie*), especially when such work's goal, as Johnston notes, is continually framed as "'containment' and 'resistance' against encroaching entropy" (340).[62] But, of course, JM and DJ's V work immediately complicates any parallel with the Cold War containment doctrine, for which notions of "encroaching entropy" were often code for a queerness ambiguously positioned within the nation yet understood as mirroring and vulnerable to the foreign threat without. The V work of *Sandover* turns inside out the premises of the Cold War containment it recalls, first by conceiving of itself as queer collaboration and then by further imagining its queerness not as a non-generative, antisocial, or deathly force but instead as a life-affirming social network built through poetry and gossip.

From the beginning—and often with disarming earnestness—Merrill considered his queer encounters with the Ouija an ineradicable stay against the perils of Cold War destruction. Writing to his mother in 1955 about his first evenings "at the Ouija board with David," he details "a series of very strange

experiences which have . . . made a profound change in my life," concluding, "I cannot calculate how much I must have suffered in my mind from the fear of absolute annihilation. Now it seems all kinds of exalted utterance, whether scripture or poetry, point to truth."[63] One way *Sandover* positions the figure of the homosexual as confronting rather than contributing to "the fear of absolute annihilation" is by transforming the loosened tongue of the queer "security risk" from a liability to an asset. True, JM, DJ, and their grapevine of intimates face recurrent censorship (and surveillance) from unseen presences shielding sensitive material: "*Censorship.* / (It happens now and then. The cup is swept / Clean off the Board. Someone has overstepped . . .)" (107). Such suppression occurs repeatedly, and as "the cup sweeps—is swept?—clear off the Board / Into the wings, a single violent swerve," inevitably "THE VERY AIR BECOMES A NERVOUSNESS" (231, 186). Ultimately, though, the poem's V work does not protect against but depends on the relaxed discretion of spirits like Ephraim, described as "spilling these top secrets" (543). Rather than safeguarding confidential information, *Sandover*'s rhetoric of secrecy stimulates—by threatening to degrade—the value of and desire for revelation, as when, in the coda, JM debates disclosing in his poem that Ephraim, the first and lowest familiar, has all along been an avatar for the angel Michael, the last and highest guide: "Not tell this secret? God, how to resist— / And for what other reason were we born?" (555). "SECRETS TOO GOOD TO BE KEPT RISK A GOSSIPY CHEAPNESS," Ephraim counsels in the source transcript for this passage, immediately adding, "THEY ALSO OF COURSE TICKLE THE HUMAN FANCY."[64] Divulging this secret, JM exemplifies the poem's willingness to "RISK A GOSSIPY CHEAPNESS" in order to "TICKLE THE HUMAN FANCY," and in a key speech addressed to Nature, JM and DJ's friend, muse, and divine mother figure Maria Mitsotáki (or MM) argues that such gossipy disclosure does not contradict but is in keeping with the spirits' wishes:

> WE COME, WE MORTALS, FROM AN AVID WEED
> CALLED CURIOSITY. IN YOUR GARDEN, MAJESTY,
> I HAVE SEEN & HEARD THE BUSY SECRETS BUZZING
> LEAF TO LEAF: 'AHA, THAT'S HOW SHE DID IT!'
> THESE FEED US, YOU FEED THEM. I THEREFORE CLAIM
> THAT YOU WANT THESE SECRETS OUT. (455)

As Maria more simply avows in a transcript, "US WEEDS" relish "THE WINDS OF A GOOD GOSSIP."[65] The poem's Ouija sessions accordingly find motiva-

tion in pleasurable play with the politically charged power dynamic of protecting, coaxing out, and "spilling . . . secrets," as if, in *Sandover*, loose lips *launch* ships.

We can see such play at work in a notebook entry from 1957 that records a particularly camp, cloak-and-dagger Ouija conversation between Ephraim and his earthly interlocutors, Merrill and Jackson (whose contributions appear in parentheses):

> It wd be possible 4 me 2 be completely discredited by a agent. (Agent? How Kafka! what men?) All I can say—there r agents. . . . (Well now don't tell us anything you shouldn't after this.) Oh I am hopeless abt state secrets. T Telling is absolutely free, it is telling that starts counter-manifestations that turn on us and cd 4 the living as well. I can tell U anything but I must be sure U will not do anything abt it + U can tell me anything but we must not set up our own little system.[66]

This exchange's ominous, Kafka-esque "agents" foreshadow the capital-T "They" of *Mirabell*, whose "surliness," threatening presence, and seemingly malicious, disembodied gossip (*They say . . .*) will contribute to the board a suddenly darker tone and an uncertainty as to whether the other world is ruled by "A BENIGN POLICE FORCE KEEPING WATCH ON US" or something more (overtly) sinister (124, 187). The exchange also recalls "those unfortunates who are"—as the *New York Times* would report—"most readily subject to the blackmail by which security secrets are often obtained by enemy agents."[67] As Ephraim presents himself as susceptible to mysterious "agents" by whom he might be "completely discredited," and hence liable to spill "state secrets," the rhetoric of "security secrets" contributes to his gossipy "telling" an alluring frisson. Despite its risks, Ephraim valorizes the pleasures of idle chatter between himself and his living mediums, who can "tell" each other "anything" so long as the end of such talk remains the act of gossip itself; and despite his caveat that their "telling" tales out of school "must not set up our own little system," in *Sandover* gossip manages precisely this. "U ARE SO QUICK MES CHERS," Ephraim boasts near the end of the first volume: "I FEEL WE HAVE / SKIPPING THE DULL CLASSROOM DONE IT ALL / AT THE SALON LEVEL" (72). Even when, in *Mirabell* and *Scripts*, "THE DULL CLASSROOM" appears to take precedence over "THE SALON," the gab sessions that bracket these lessons establish their own system of being in and apprehending the Ouija's world, ensuring that the insights of everyday gossip continually reshape gospel. As Auden says in an

unpublished transcript, "I HAVE LONG THOUGHT WE MUST HAVE SMALL CHATS BEHIND BIG BACKS DO U NOT AGREE? NOT NOT NOT SECRETS BUT OF WEE HUMAN WONDERS."[68]

Rearticulating a postwar homosexuality often seen, as Edelman writes, in terms of "the lack—or worse, the repudiation—of generative productivity," *Sandover* represents gossip as a form of figurative and literal procreation, "SMALL CHATS BEHIND BIG BACKS" that both dish on and themselves help produce "WEE HUMAN WONDERS."[69] The episode based on the transcript warning of "agents," for example, relates a madcap sequence of events in which JM, DJ and Ephraim conspire to provide Ephraim's recently deceased earthly charge "a running start on life" by having his soul, for which Ephraim is responsible, reborn to JM's pregnant "niece Betsy" (19).[70] At the same time, they haphazardly arrange for another soul to be reborn to "Gin—that will be Virginia—West," the pregnant wife of DJ's "ex-roommate" (20). Blurring loose talk and reproduction, JM and DJ play midwife, a figure for which gossip—if we summon its etymology—provides another term. And as with gossip, which accumulates unforeseeable meanings as it is reproduced, the second soul JM and DJ midwife is accidentally "born to a VIRGINIA WEST IN STATE / ASYLUM," since DJ "too late / Recalls 'Gin's' real name: Jennifer Marie" (29). Though Betsy, as intended, gives birth to a child, Wendell, who "OUTDOES THE WILDEST DREAMS / OF PATRONS," the queer reproduction of JM and DJ's gossip—like that of the homosexual "security risk"—is met with fearful reprisal (29). "We have MEDDLED," Ephraim confesses, "And the POWERS // ARE FURIOUS," threatening to intercept and cut off JM and DJ's otherworldly contact: "AGENTS CAN BREAK OUR CODE / TO SMITHEREENS" (29).

When JM sheepishly visits his "ex-shrink," Tom, "[w]ith the whole story," Merrill situates this affair in the psychohistorical context of the 1950s, framing its strangely generative idle talk as a response to cultural conceptions of homosexual morbidity (29). "[W]hat you and David do / We call folie à deux," Tom declares, continuing:

> ". . . Now suppose you spell
>
> It out. What underlies these odd
> Inseminations by psycho-roulette?"
> I stared, then saw the light:
> "Somewhere a Father Figure shakes his rod

At sons who have not sired a child?
Through our own spirit we can both proclaim
And shuffle off the blame
For how we live—that good enough?" (30)

As in his sessions consulting the Ouija, this session on the analyst's couch provides revelation but demands JM himself "spell / It out." Acting again as a medium, even midwife—now for the high gossip of psychoanalysis—JM speculates that Wendell, along with Ephraim himself and the Ouija's "odd / Inseminations by psycho-roulette" more generally, form a shared fantasy through which he and DJ attempt to mitigate the perceived oblivion of their childlessness and its threat to the nuclear family. Yet while this somewhat pat explanation is "good enough" for Tom, JM tacitly rejects its normative emphases on childlessness as a problem and on the sexuality that is to "blame." That very night—in what we might think of as a small chat behind the big back of a midcentury psychoanalysis hostile to homosexuality—he and DJ happily resume their "folie à deux" and celebrate the co-creativity of their queer reproduction, reconnecting with Ephraim ("Our beloved friend / Was back with us!"), who dishes that "FREUD . . . DESPAIRS / OF HIS DISCIPLES & SAYS BITTE NIE / ZU AUFGEBEN THE KEY / TO YR OWN NATURES"—*never surrender the key to your own natures* (31, 30). Reworking Tom's revelation, they decide of Ephraim: "*He* was the revelation / (Or if we had created him, then we were)" (32).

In considering how the idle talk out of which Ephraim emerges potentially discloses both other and self, "[*h*]*e*" and "we," JM here posits that the self (or selves) parenthetical to the Ouija's revelations might in fact be the revelation. Is the medium the message? Is JM simply a midwife or gossip for texts "THAT OTHERS 'WRITE' "? Or do the voices channeled in his poem provide a means for his own composition? As *Sandover* takes up such questions, its queer reproduction becomes a trope for JM's (and implicitly Merrill's) authorship and vice versa—substitutions at work when, later in *Ephraim*, Wallace Stevens's ghost responds to the poem in progress by cautioning JM:

A SCRIBE SITS BY YOU CONSTANTLY THESE DAYS
DOING WHAT HE MUST TO INTERWEAVE
YOUR LINES WITH MEANINGS YOU CANNOT CONCEIVE
Parts of this, in other words—a rotten
Thing to insinuate—have been ghostwritten? (72)

Stevens's immediate implication—as we have seen, a recurring one—is that JM's largely received poem forms part of a select body of literally "ghostwritten" work, as with Eliot and Rimbaud. In this sense, the challenge to JM's poetic autonomy in the idea that he takes divine dictation explains much of what makes this intimation feel "rotten." "What most scandalizes us about a 'dictated' poem," argues Brian McHale, "is the way it undermines common-sense notions of authority."[71] Yet even an apparatus as weirdly clunky as the "Ouija's ventriloquy" can be, as McHale shows, abstracted, naturalized, and made to conform to such "common-sense notions of authority" as the figures of the inspiring muse, of literary tradition, or of language itself, suggesting that authorial anxieties alone do not account for the scandal of Merrill's dictated poem.[72] Perhaps more intractably scandalous, then, is another possible source for JM's dictations, one closer to hand: DJ. Stevens's charge of ghostwriting also implicates DJ, deemed by the spirits "HAND" but indeed another "SCRIBE" (Jackson was a frustrated novelist) who more obviously "SITS BY" JM "CONSTANTLY," his right hand atop the inverted teacup that skates across the Ouija, spelling out, letter by letter, the raw material of *Sandover*. Alison Lurie's notoriously gossipy memoir of Merrill and Jackson's relationship makes the case that although critics "have usually written and spoken as if *Sandover* were the work of James Merrill alone," Jackson "was in an essential sense the co-author of *Sandover*, so much of which flowed through his hand, and none of which could have been written without him."[73] Merrill himself muses about his "ghostwritten" poem, "I wonder if the trilogy shouldn't have been signed with both our names—or simply 'by DJ, as told to JM'?"[74]

Though often diminished, or taken for granted, DJ's ambiguous authorial role reminds us that—again like *The Waste Land*, a shared undertaking (as JM points out) between Eliot and "Uncle Ezra" even without Rimbaud's alleged ghostly intervention (219)—*Sandover* is also the product of human collaboration. In thinking about this earthly partnership, especially, it is useful to consider Wayne Koestenbaum's insight, in his study of male literary collaboration, "that double authorship attacks not primarily our dogmas of literary property, but of sexual propriety."[75] If, as Koestenbaum theorizes, "men who collaborate engage in a metaphorical sexual intercourse," often figuring "the text they balance between them" as "the child of their sexual union," perhaps what strikes JM as particularly "rotten" in the above passage is how Stevens's pun on "CONCEIVE" links phobic perceptions of homosexuality as

sterile ("YOU CANNOT CONCEIVE") with epistemological and imaginative lack (an inability to comprehend or envisage the "MEANINGS" of even one's own "LINES") and thus a loss of poetic authority.[76] We can interpret, that is, Stevens as negatively insinuating—like JM's "ex-shrink," Tom, but "in other words"—that a queer authorial failure to "CONCEIVE" is *the cause* as much as the effect of the poem's "hav[ing] been ghostwritten." *Sandover*'s insistence otherwise—its faith in a way of being whose "MEANINGS YOU CANNOT CONCEIVE" but which promises poetic revelations limned in part by gossip—scandalously reworks the Cold War figure of the perilously non-generative, antisocial queer.

"THE ONES WHO HOLD THE WORLD TOGETHER"

Inverting Cold War fears of the homosexual, Merrill portrays childlessness, same-sex erotics, and the indiscreet reproductions of gossip—all aspects of a queer world belittled as frivolous, effeminate, and threatening—as constitutive of alternative forms of social relation that are crucial to, rather than disastrous for, *Sandover*'s anti-apocalyptic verse. As the lessons of *Mirabell* proceed, DJ wonders specifically if his and JM's homosexuality has something to do with their being chosen as poetic mediums for the spirits' instruction:

> What part, I'd like to ask Them, does sex play
> In this whole set-up? Why did They choose *us*?
> Are we more usable than Yeats or Hugo,
> Doters on women, who then went ahead
> To doctor everything their voices said?
> We haven't done that. JM: No indeed.
> Erection of theories, dissemination
> Of thought—the intellectual's machismo.
> We're more the docile takers-in of seed.
> No matter what tall tale our friends emit,
> Lately—you've noticed?—we just swallow it. (154)

The Ouija's divine gossip—what "They" say—here becomes a form of oral (and aural) sex for its "usable" mediums, whose one shared line in this "docile" duet ("We haven't done that. JM: No indeed") appropriately notes and insists upon what has *not* been done, as if comically to underline the daffy passivity of their feminized collaboration and its ostensible failure to generate substantive "theories" or "thought." In passages like this one, Merrill, as

Gwiazda writes, performs a "queer critique of masculinist and heterosexist tropes that surround the existing notions of authority," one that "uses the same rhetoric that categorizes homosexual men as passive rather than active, immature rather than mature, superficial rather than profound."[77] The force of this critique derives largely from Merrill's redeployment of the reproductive rhetorics of both authorship and queerness. JM and DJ's ironic willingness to "swallow" the Ouija's "marvelous nightly pudding" thus might seem an anti-reproductive mode—a camp travesty of both procreation and literary production that refuses to "disseminat[e]" the "machismo" of heteronormativity—and in part, it is. The same biological nonreproduction that arouses Cold War suspicions raises homosexuality to a position of privilege in *Sandover*'s celestial hierarchy, where its "CHILDLESSNESS" helps avert the ecologically ruinous overpopulation of "FUSED MAN IN HIS CLOSELY / PACKD CITY," which, like "THE FUSED ATOM," alarms God Biology (216, 194). In the Ouija's mirror world it is the outsized figure of heterosexual fecundity, not homosexual sterility, that signifies annihilation.

Yet JM and DJ's receptiveness to the board's "odd / Inseminations by psycho-roulette" constitutes, as we have seen, less their inability or refusal to reproduce than the capacity to reproduce queerly. In addition to the rebirths for which JM and DJ notably play midwives, in *Mirabell* JM also appears as godparent—another role for which *gossip* once provided a name—to Urania, his Greek American godchild "in the first pride of speech" (111). Urania's name suggests the heavenly muse but also, as Reena Sastri notes, "uranium, fuel for nuclear weapons, and uranism, a term designating homosexuality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century."[78] Gossip, nuclear threat, homosexuality, and futurity: as "Noné (godfather)" to Urania, JM becomes symbolically responsible for a set of concerns that serve as inspiration for his poem—a project over which, as Auden later explains, this child "MUSE . . . PRESIDES" (111, 261). JM's various parental guises—midwife, queer uncle, godparent: gossips all—also serve as authorial representations that reflect Merrill's understanding of his collaborative poem as itself an alternative form of reproduction. Years after *Sandover*'s completion, Merrill's memoir describes how "distress" over his "childlessness" passed once the home he shared with Jackson "had filled up . . . with Ephraim and Company, who were prepared, like children, to take up as much of our time as we cared to give, but whose conversation outsparkled Ravenna, and who never had to be washed or fed or driven to their school basketball games."[79] "I wonder, by the way, where they get the idea that homosexuals

aren't breeders," he wryly comments in a 1991 interview. "I know quite a few who are."[80]

Merrill joins a long and venerable tradition of homosexual "breeders" in *Sandover*. When Mirabell, picking up DJ's lingering question about homosexuality's role "[i]n this whole set up," exalts the homosexual over "ALL SO-CALLD NORMAL LOVERS" who "MUST PRODUCE AT LAST / BODIES" and "DO NOT EXIST FOR ANY OTHER PURPOSE" (156), his account of same-sex attachments that spawn, in poetic form, wisdom and virtue echoes Plato's *Symposium* and its metaphorical distinction between "men who are pregnant in body" ("drawn more towards women," such men "express their love in trying to obtain for themselves immortality and remembrance . . . by producing children") and "men who are pregnant in mind" (whose "relationship with beauty" in the form of male bodies gives birth to beautiful ideas, ideal forms). Of these types, men who are pregnant in mind "have a much closer partnership with each other and a stronger bond of friendship than parents have, because the children of their partnership are more beautiful and more immortal."[81] Mirabell similarly contends that same-sex desire gives birth to art: "LOVE OF ONE MAN FOR ANOTHER OR LOVE BETWEEN WOMEN / IS A NEW DEVELOPMENT OF THE PAST 4000 YEARS / ENCOURAGING SUCH MIND VALUES AS PRODUCE THE BLOSSOMS / OF POETRY & MUSIC" (156). Though JM lightly challenges the elitism of this claim—"[c]ome now, admit that certain very great / Poets and musicians have been straight"—his words themselves reclaim the Homintern discourse linking queerness to the arts. And Auden, too, ventures that it is precisely because of their biological "CHILDLESSNESS" that he, JM, DJ, and the "insouciantly childless" Maria have been chosen for the spirits' V work (156, 216, 102):

> 3 OF US IN MM'S EUPHEMISM
> COMME CA & SHE (THOUGH FEMALE) NOT IN LIFE
> MUCH DRAWN TO ROLES OF MOTHER MISTRESS WIFE,
> WHY ARE WE 4 TOGETHER LISTENING?
> A) 3 WRITERS & MM RATHER A MUSE
> B) EXCEPT AS MESSENGERS WE HAVE NO
> COMMITMENT TO A YOUNGER GENERATION (205)

When JM again poses "Wystan's question: Why the four of us?" Mirabell maintains, in language that directly references the *Symposium*, "KEEP IN MIND THE CHILDLESSNESS WE SHARE THIS TURNS US / OUTWARD TO THE LESSONS & THE MYSTERIES," suggesting that the board's "4 TO-

GETHER" are pregnant not in body but in mind (216).[82] That this in-group's lone heterosexual, "FEMALE," and nonwriter, MM, is ultimately revealed to be an incarnation of the immortal Plato, and thus very much "COMME CA," retroactively lends further credence to Auden's Platonic surmise about the nature of their collaboration and its attendant bond of friendship.[83]

At the same time, Maria's unveiling as Plato helps to cast *Sandover*'s treatment of his philosophy of desire in a more ambiguous light. However rightly, interpretations of the *Symposium* often emphasize how Socrates, using Diotima as a medium, advocates the sublimation of sexual desire into an attachment to beautiful forms themselves, transcending relations with individuals in favor of the contemplation of abstract principles—sentiments Mirabell at first appears to endorse when he explains that "MIND IN ITS PURE FORM IS A NONSEXUAL PASSION / OR A UNISEXUAL ONE PRODUCING ONLY LIGHT" (156). But although *Sandover*'s queer reproduction is predicated on the absence of biological reproduction, it is not therefore "NONSEXUAL" or "UNISEXUAL," and not anti-relational. Mirabell's Platonic declamations, in fact, are occasioned by his transformation from the bat-like creature hitherto known as 741 into a "SOMEWHAT ATHENIAN," or homosexual, peacock who has "COME TO LOVE" his earthly interlocutors (157, 155). Hardly "NONSEXUAL" or anti-relational, Mirabell's metamorphosis from mathematical abstraction into embodied, feeling initiate in "THIS WORLD OF COURTESY" is imagined as a coming out (JM asks, "was there from the first a Peacock that/Struggled within you to unseat the Bat?"), and it is produced, Auden believes, by the gossipy, imaginative, and affective connections of "WE 4 TOGETHER": "MM & I / IMAGINE U, YOU US, & WHERE THE POWERS / CRISSCROSS WE ALL IMAGINE 741 / & THEN TRANSFORM HIM!" (155, 158, 159). *Sandover* borrows Plato's theory of same-sex reproduction but refuses interpretations of this theory that would abstract it into a "NONSEXUAL" relation that transcends the social. Having first advanced that version of the *Symposium*'s philosophy, Mirabell more ambivalently dishes that Plato "CLUNG TO AN IDEAL BOTH LOFTY & STERILE" (158), a point Auden's gossip about Plato has made even more bluntly:

> IDEAL FORMS ALSO LEAVE HIM COLD HE KEEPS
> SQUINTING THROUGH KEYHOLES AT SOME LITHE YOUNG BOD
> POOR OLD GAFFER
> SAY IT: POOR OLD SOD (147)

Here, the poem's hot gossip again revises cold gospel.

If such gossip in *Sandover* and its playful handling of the poem's more lofty ideas seems insouciant to the point of insignificance, we would do well to remember that the *Symposium*'s seemingly austere philosophy is itself, as Roland Barthes proposes in *A Lover's Discourse*, "a gossip."[84] Gossip structures the text's nested series of accounts, in which Athenian intellectuals gather to celebrate Agathon's victory, drink, and gossip about eros and each other's relationships; and in which we see that, years later, their enticing dish circulates unabated—on the road from Phalerum, both Glaucon and an unnamed interlocutor breathlessly seek out the dialogue's frame narrator, Apollodorus, who has himself consulted Aristodemus, in order "to get the full story of the party at Agathon's," a party that took place when they "were still children."[85] "Such is the genesis of the theory of love," Barthes writes: "an accident, boredom, a desire to talk, or, if you will, a gossip lasting little over a mile."[86] *Sandover*'s alternative theories of reproduction not only draw on Plato's but also, as in his symposium, emerge more as the product of the poem's seemingly frivolous, revisionary gossip and its queer network of relations than as the distillation of its didactic lessons.

That is to say, it is not just at the level of representation that *Sandover* enacts gossip's ability to produce queer relations, but also formally. Consider, for example, the following characteristic little scene of gossip, sparked by Mirabell's question, "IS THE PEACOCK NOT ALSO SOMEWHAT ATHENIAN?"

> JM: Platonic? Oh, you mean the peacock
> I once put in a poem set in Athens?
> Yes, of course. DJ: Would he be using
> "Athenian" in the sense that Marius—
> 3 CHEERS FOR DAVID HE STANDS UP FOR US!
> Is that you, Marius? COME & GONE MY DEAR
> PLATO SAYS ATHENS WAS AT BEST HALF QUEER
> What's Plato *like*? O YOU KNOW TATTLETALE GRAY
> NIGHTGOWN OFF ONE SHOULDER DECLASSEE,
> TO QUOTE MM A GAS, TO QUOTE CK (158)

Quite a lot, and yet very little of consequence, might seem to take place in this dizzying bit of talk, which culminates in Auden's gossip about Plato. Yet such ripples of gossip eddy in and out of the poem's lyrics, lessons, and more general dialogue so consistently as to warrant closer attention. Though eschewing "machismo," over the course of the poem the form of gossip itself constitutes an "[e]rection of theories, dissemination / Of thought" about

loose talk, poetry, and queer relationality. In this regard, this passage's most salient features include the intricate mix of voices reproduced in its eleven lines, shared by five different speakers—Mirabell, JM, DJ, the critic Marius Bewley, and Auden, whose gossip adds three additional voices when he quotes Plato, MM and CK (Auden's lover, Chester Kallman)—and the fact that these voices are not simply in conversation but, in speaking primarily about absent others (Marius, Plato, MM, CK), engaged in gossip.

Mirabell's allusion to Merrill's early poems "The Peacock" and "Transfigured Bird"; DJ's talk of Marius's favored term for homosexuality, "Athenian"; Marius's inclusive, queer "US"; Auden's familiar "O YOU KNOW"; the camp posture and sexual subject matter of the gossip more generally—these cozy aspects of the poem's talk reflect, but also create, the board's often odd affinities between selves and others including the living and dead, male and female, queer and straight, young and old, real and fictional, human and nonhuman.[87] In so doing, they might seem to align with the arguments of those critics who have—as we have seen with readers of Stein's and O'Hara's poetic talk—categorized the poem's chatter as "conversation" whose interplay between "self and other" speaks to an ethic of dignified "equality" or respectful "mutuality."[88] But while these discussions valuably attend to *Sandover*'s poetics of the everyday and its effects of intimacy, their insistence on conversational mutuality, respect, and manners softens the feel and workings of the poem's many unruly scenes of *gossip*—how, for example, in this passage, as elsewhere in the poem, authority obtains in speaking *of* as much as *to* others. Even those present find themselves absented by gossip, as when, though JM addresses Mirabell directly, DJ speaks of him in the third person; or when Marius, summoned to the board by DJ's gossip, reciprocates by speaking about rather than to DJ. Conversely—and again, as we have seen with the poetry of Stein, Hughes, and O'Hara—gossip's objectifying talk also animates its objects' agency: Mirabell's nod to Merrill's poetry gives way to JM's voice, DJ's talk of Marius enables his brief appearance, and the entrance of Maria/Plato in the ensuing passage follows this scene's gossip about Plato. Throughout the poem, the agency and intimacies of being in the know are counterbalanced by and depend on the sense that one is also, inevitably, out of the loop—a dynamic whose fraught pleasures owe their charge to the rhetorics of Cold War sexual suspicion and their redeployment, rhetorics that a framing of the poem's talk as conversation obscures. Thus Auden, part of *Sandover*'s inmost group, repeatedly appears after "overhearing/Some gossip," surfacing to interject, "CHATTING ABOUT

ME MY DEARS?" or "DID I HEAR MY NAME?" (175, 181, 419). Similarly, as soon as he complains that it is "TOO UNFAIR" that Maria "NEVER GETS DISCUSSED BEHIND HER BACK," the inequity of this inequity is remedied by JM and DJ, who invite him to seize the first "opportunity / To talk behind Maria's back" (419, 422). Maria, who instigates much of the poem's dish ("TIME FOR TALK, CHAPS?" [309]), aptly expresses gossip's irresistible vicissitudes in a transcript exchange with JM: "I MUST SAY AN OLD REMNANT OF MANNERS MAKES ME CRINGE TO HAVE THIS SERIES OF IN-GROUPS OF COURSE ANOTHER OLD REMNANT WELL—is delighted. ARE WE NOT A W F U L ? LETS TALK ABOUT WHA."[89] In *Sandover*, the reassuring mutuality of conversational manners has nothing on the queer experience of gossip's awful pleasures.

The poetic features of *Sandover*'s talk are far from incidental to these pleasures and the network of voices they produce. In the passage above, for instance, Marius does not so much complete DJ's interrupted thought ("Marius—") as assert affinity by commandeering his rhyme ("STANDS UP FOR US"); likewise, it is rhyme more than reason that ensures that Auden's gossipy take on Plato ("TATTLETALE GRAY") accords with MM's ("DECLASSEE") and that of "CK." Merrill's pentameter also engenders connections among the passage's colliding voices, most apparently in those instances when questioning and answering speakers share a single line, but also in accommodating interruptions that, by filling out the meter, additionally serve as complements. Further, by introducing dramatic side-text indicating speakers (as in "JM:" or "DJ:") into lines whose pentameter requires its pronunciation, the poet himself—and in turn his reader—form a necessary part of the network of voices. This side-text does not belong to any of the passage's voices yet formally must be voiced, suggesting that the poet orchestrating the poem's gossip network also emerges as part of it: the poet, too, is a gossip.

Sandover's many passages like this one exhibit its larger structure in miniature, showing how, throughout the poem, no single voice ever seems to originate or complete its own thought and each utterance, no matter how authoritative, is subject to—even subjects itself to—subsequent revision. In *Scripts*, especially, JM and DJ's experience of the lessons, as well as the angels' lessons themselves, must be fleshed out after the fact by WHA and MM's behind-the-scenes gossip: "We yearn for tomorrow's inside story / From Maria and Wystan—what they won't have seen!" JM writes (285). The poem's

pattern of gossipy supplements to its official scenes of instruction illustrates just how much its disembodied gospel depends on sensual gossip, forming a "self-revising" structure that led Merrill to claim of *Sandover*, "It's not so much a visionary poem as a revisionary one, I often fear."[90] David Kalstone writes of *Sandover* that "there is no final truth revealed: individual revelations keep changing their shapes, and symbols . . . demand constant reinterpretation"; and McHale could be describing gossip when he similarly asks of the poem, "No ultimately reliable version of things is ever achieved, and who knows how far the process could go?"[91] Formally and thematically, from micro to macro levels, gossip plays a structuring role in *Sandover*.

The poem's epistemological problems of truth, interpretation, and reliability are no doubt effects, in large part, of Merrill's use of the Ouija board as a compositional tool. Yet gossip's "no-proof rhetoric" is not simply an analogy for Merrill's Ouija board poetics. In a poem concerned with the historical whispers of sexual and political suspicion surrounding the pervert and the poet, it is just as likely the other way around: Merrill's Ouija board is commonly read as, in Vendler's words, a figure "for language itself" or, as David Lehman puts it, "a clear though audacious metaphor for language as the source of death-defying poetry," but insofar as the obstinately literal contrivance of the Ouija can be understood as figurative, surely this overdetermined figure also represents gossip, another social exchange in which a medium takes in and performs a chorus of disembodied voices for a select group of friends, often gathered around a table.[92] In E. F. Benson's series of Lucia novels, from which *Sandover* borrows much of its camp style, the Ouija board represents just such a figure for gossip. The cover of one of Merrill's Ouija notebooks takes its label—"weedj"—from the term for consulting the Ouija coined by characters in *Lucia in London*, one of the Benson novels that, Merrill notes in *Sandover*, he and friends from Stonington, including Robert Morse, "reread—/And reenact—each summer" (257). *Lucia in London* features a plotline in which Lucia's neighbors in the village of Riseholme acquire a Ouija board and make contact with a familiar spirit named Abfou, who does little more than dish on the absent Lucia's snobbishness; and the opening of *Mirabell* echoes Benson's use of the Ouija as a figure for village gossip by comically imagining any "small town" as a seemingly occult "state of mind, a medium/Wherein suspended, microscopic figments/—Boredom, malice, curiosity—/Catch a steadily more revealing light" (97).[93] *Mirabell* thus presciently begins by conceiving of the "medium" not as an individual person

but, like the shared alphabet of the Ouija or the shared tradition of poetry, as a communal space occupied by varied affects, perspectives, and voices—an atmosphere of potentially world-making gossip.

Within this space of relationality, the reproduction of poetic gossip constructs a queer, postnuclear family that brings JM and DJ together with literary father figure Auden and surrogate mother figure Maria. These alternative familial ties are most immediately evident in the group's endearments: JM and DJ call Maria "Maman," while to her they are "MES ENFANTS" (to Auden, "MY BOYS"). "ENFANTS MES VRAIS ENFANTS," Maria intones, "I AM FREE / OF ALL OLD BLOOD TIES & CONNECT MY LIFE / WITH YOURS" (246). In keeping with the family dynamic, Auden coyly refers to himself and Maria (or rather Plato) as "A FAIRY PAIR," and in hindsight we can see how this family romance of queer parentage plays out in Auden's constant dashing off to "JAW WITH PLATO," intercourse that makes their relationship the stuff of gossip (303, 159, 141). Modulating the Cold War figure of the homosexual as an embodiment of perversion, loose talk, and nuclear threat, JM conceives the core group of him, DJ, Auden, and Maria (Mirabell will soon be added, and Ephraim is never far from hand) as a little nucleus, or—linking his postnuclear family to the gossipy Verdurin salon in Proust—"What might be seen as her 'petit noyau' / By Mme Verdurin" (147). Rather than an antisocial vision of queerness, in Merrill's poem affective queer kinship instead moves, through the reproduction of its poetic gossip, toward unexpected relations. As JM tells DJ, "Wystan, Maria, you and I, we four / Nucleate a kind of psychic atom": "At the core / *We* are kept from shattering to bits / By the electron hearts, voices and wits / Of our dead friends . . . In orbit round us" (191). "FACED WITH NUCLEAR DISASTER," the poem suggests one might find not "DESPAIR" but relief in the "celestial salon" of queer "hearts, voices, and wits" protectively gathered, as Ephraim affirms, "ROUND U IN A WIDE CHARMED CIRCLE" (128).

In this sense, *Sandover* suggests the "queer utopian methodology" described by José Esteban Muñoz, turning to gossip as an optic "that can potentially perceive the residue of the utopian impulse that animated preidentitarian queer politics" and in turn "deploy the knowledge gleaned from queer ephemeral archives for the purposes of reanimating and reviving this utopian impulse."[94] Out of the Cold War's anxious discourse of queer reproduction, Merrill revives a guardedly utopian vision of poetic gossip as a relational mode. The term "gossip" originally meant "being a friend of," and *Sandover* finds in gossip's "no-proof rhetoric" a form of queer friendship. In

his essay "In Defence of Gossip," the real-world Auden asserts that, "as a game played under the right rules," gossip is "an act of friendliness . . . and a creative work of art."[95] For Merrill, too, art, gossip, and friendship are conflated: Edmund White writes that in *Sandover*, "the sort of love expressed all around—decorous, teasing, edifying, at turns witty and grave—this love seems to me a utopian vision of love, a vision most often glimpsed these days by homosexuals, one that draws on the energies of both family love and romantic love but transforms that vitality into something new, a sublime sort of friendship."[96] Materer concurs that "the value of ideal friendships within the poem . . . points the way to a renewed humanity" but thinks it "doubtful that this is a specifically sexual ideal."[97] Yet although Merrill does not suggest anything inherently homosexual in this ideal, it seems to me doubtful that *Sandover*'s pursuit of it can be distinguished from the poem's efforts to reshape the historical contours of biologically nonreproductive same-sex relationships. *Sandover*'s friendship ethic in many ways anticipates Michel Foucault's late work and the idea, as expressed in a 1981 interview, that "the development towards which the problem of homosexuality tends is the one of friendship": "not to discover in oneself the truth of sex but rather to use sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships."[98] White's description, in 1983, of "a sublime sort of friendship" that is "most often glimpsed these days by homosexuals" resonates with Foucault's claim that "homosexuality is an historic occasion to re-open affective and relational virtualities, not so much through the intrinsic qualities of the homosexual, but due to the biases against the position he occupies" and thus those "diagonal lines that he can trace in the social fabric" that "permit him to make these virtualities visible."[99] The "diagonal lines" traced by the poetic gossip of the defiantly childless JM and DJ at the Ouija certainly "make . . . virtualities visible": "Between the lines," Merrill notes in one Ouija transcript, "a hint that none of these souls see each other except thru us—that we are a kind of communications satellite for them." In the same transcript Ephraim declares that "us homosexuals," in DJ's words, "ARE THE ONES WHO HOLD THE WORLD TOGETHER."[100]

Foucault contends that "what makes homosexuality 'disturbing'" is not "the sexual act itself" but rather "the homosexual mode of life": "everything that can be uncomfortable in affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie and companionship, things which our rather sanitized society can't allow a place for without fearing the formation of new alliances and the tying together of unforeseen lines of force."[101] Merrill seems to have a

similar, if more demotic, sense of what normative culture might find "disturbing" about homosexuality when, in a published notebook fragment recording an anecdote about John Cage, he writes:

> Crowded lecture hall, one of his last appearances.
>
> Member of audience: Mr. Cage, do you and Merce Cunningham have a homosexual relationship?
>
> Long pause. JC (amiably): Well . . . I cook and he eats.[102]

The subversive humor of Cage's answer—perhaps euphemistic, perhaps not—"amiably" challenges his audience to acknowledge an intimacy between men (who are also, notably, artistic collaborators) that is perhaps as unsettling to convention as any sexual act. At the same time, the sexually infused details of this domestic arrangement flirtatiously confuse straightforward attempts to distinguish between ways of life and sexual acts, or to reinforce categories such as active and passive, masculine and feminine, normal and perverse—even literal and figurative, or cohabitation and collaboration.

In *Sandover*, the seemingly benign recurring image of JM and DJ seated together before the Ouija board similarly emblematizes the sly provocation such queer intimacy can represent, as if announcing, *Well . . . I'm the* SCRIBE *and he's the* HAND. Over the course of the twentieth century even the Ouija board has been conscripted as a figure for the intimate parlor game of heterosexual courtship, with its passive, feminine medium instructively taking dictation from a penetrating, masculine higher power. The perhaps surprising legibility of the board's gendered erotics is presumed, for example, in two mainstream depictions of the Ouija, each of which portrays what Merrill and Jackson might call "[d]oters on women, who then went ahead/To doctor everything their voices said." The first depiction, Norman Rockwell's 1920 painting *The Ouija Board*, created for the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post*, illustrates the charged pause following a question posed by the romantic couple at the board. Her bearing suggests a frivolous credulity and passivity; his, action and rationality: casting her expectant gaze heavenward, her fingers resting lightly on the pointer, she awaits the spirits' reply, seemingly unaware that it (and she) is being manipulated by her partner, whose straightforward stare, erotically intruding posture, and firm hold on the planchette insistently pointed toward "YES" imply he won't take no for an answer. Her head is in the stars, his feet are on the ground; and the Ouija

The Erotics of the Ouija (1). Norman Rockwell, *The Ouija Board*, 1920.

Oh, OUIJA®, can we take the car?
Shall I become a model or fashion designer?
What college will accept me?
Who's Debbie's date for the Prom?
Are flying saucers for real?
Should we go steady?
Funny how a boy seems to make the best partner!
OUIJA
Especially if he's open-minded and willing to give the OUIJA® Talking Board a fair try. You can ask it absolutely anything . . . questions about love, school, money, travel, work, other people, or the future. Makes a great Christmas present for anyone who likes the fascinating experience of exploring the unknown.
®Parker Brothers Registered Trademark for its Talking Board Set
FAMOUS PARKER GAMES

The Erotics of the Ouija (2). Advertisement for Parker Brothers Ouija Talking Board, December 1968. The OUIJA name and images are property of Hasbro, Inc. Used with permission. © 2017 Hasbro, Inc.

perched suggestively upon their laps mediates and stands in for the displaced erotics of this encounter—a dynamic still evident in the second depiction, a 1968 advertisement for a commercially produced Ouija. "Funny how a boy seems to make the best partner!" this ad exclaims. "Especially," its copy clarifies, "if he's open-minded and willing to give the OUIJA Talking Board a fair try." The board's placement—its alphabet right side up for the man in Rockwell's image, for the girl in the advertisement—suggests a shift in this partnership's agency; yet in assuming that the girl to whom its pitch is addressed would have no skepticism to overcome and in positioning her as an ideally passive consumer, the ad also echoes the conventional gender roles of the first depiction. Here, the girl's flurry of questions connotes feminine frivolity ("Oh, OUIJA, can we take the car?"), fantasy ("Shall I become a model, or a fashion designer?"), gossip ("Who's Debbie's date for the prom?"), and naiveté ("Are flying saucers for real?"); while the boy's fewer and more restrained inquiries ("What college will accept me?" and "Should we go steady?") imply the desired corrective of a practical, masculine rationality.

The lack of such stereotypically masculinist comportment at their board—not to mention a female presence—distinguishes JM and DJ's sessions from both the Ouija's popular iconography and, as DJ jokes, from those literary models of (occult) collaboration found in "Yeats or Hugo," models that doctor, erect, disseminate, and emit rather than docilely take in or just swallow.[103] The poem's conceptions of poetic and queer creation often rely on and rework the popular, sexual rhetoric surrounding the Ouija itself: as Shoptaw puts it, "Merrill's receptive cup and erogenous-zones board make a refreshing break from the too often dully phallic pen."[104] In a review of *Sandover*, Thom Gunn invokes "above all" the image of Merrill and Jackson "sitting at the Ouija board" as part of his pointed celebration of the poem's depiction of what he calls "a gay marriage" and the "triumph" of this relationship's invention of an improbable world:

> The men's life together is presented to us in detail which is almost casual: we see them choosing wallpaper, keeping house, traveling, entertaining, and above all sitting at the Ouija board. It is not a minor triumph and it is not an incidental one because, after all, it is the two of them in their closeness who have evoked the whole spirit world of [*Sandover*], or perhaps even created it.[105]

Sandover's presentation of this marriage is less acquiescence to desexualized norms of domesticity than a strategic deployment, "almost casual," of the

Funny How a Boy Seems to Make the Best Partner. James Merrill and David Jackson at the Ouija Board, 1983. Photograph by Harris Pemberton.

discomfiting effects of homosexual "affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie and companionship." Photographs of Merrill and Jackson intimately seated at the Ouija in their Stonington home frequently appear in the paratextual materials surrounding *Sandover*, as if the couple delighted in staging the queer disjunction between their impossibly ambitious poem and the unlikely authorial image of two grown men holding hands atop a teacup, absorbed by what Merrill calls "this absurd, flimsy contraption, creaking along," the air about them pregnant with "affective and relational virtualities," the gossip of unheard voices, unseen worlds, meanings we cannot conceive.[106] In *Sandover* it is funny, indeed, how a boy seems to make the best partner.

"Acoustical Chambers": Gossip, Lyric, Tone

I have so far in this chapter treated gossip primarily as a social form, something Merrill represents and thinks about in *Sandover*, while suggesting, too, that it is something he thinks *with*, as he finds in loose talk one model for the queer reproduction of his collaborative, "revisionary" poem. Implicit in my account of how *Sandover*'s gossip productively takes up and rearticulates the terms of a rather anxious midcentury relationship between privacy and publicity, and of how it reparatively reinflects the postwar sus-

picions surrounding homosexuality, reproduction, and nuclear threat, has been the problem of poetic tone—a dilemma to which I want now, in my chapter's final sections, explicitly to turn. For it is the aesthetic and literary-historical problem of tone inherent in *Sandover*'s method of composition, I propose, that both shapes and takes specific shape within the poem's queer concerns with postwar social questions of selfhood, agency, and relationality. By tone, I mean the common critical metaphor by which we refer to a poem's tone of voice, the emotional stance it appears to adopt in relation to its material and auditor. A key term for the New Criticism, and one of the cornerstone pedagogical concepts of Brooks and Warren's textbook *Understanding Poetry* and its influential method of lyric reading, a poem's tone, we learn there, "indicates the speaker's attitude toward his subject and toward his audience, and sometimes toward himself"; though poetry lacks the vocal intonation or gestural signals of conversation, nonetheless in a poem, as "in ordinary life, a great part of our meaning—our basic attitude toward the *what* and the *who* of any transaction—is indicated by the tone."[107] As any good gossip knows, *how* a thing is said is as important as, if not more than, the statement itself; the same set of words with different tones might easily express opposed meanings. Thus, as any good gossip also knows, tonal reproduction is liable to go awry. It is this liability that *Sandover* exploits in performing its culture's texts but with different emphasis and feeling, a different "basic attitude toward the *what* and the *who*" involved, and, therefore, as we have seen, very different meanings from those originally intended. In *Sandover* the uncertainties of tone, like those of gossip, provide a positive figure for the poem's queer reproduction.

The instability of tone in *Sandover* begins in the Ouija board's mute voices, manifest only as alphabetical characters, and is duplicated in the hastily scrawled source transcripts of these sessions, which give little sense of who is speaking, what is being said, and how.[108] As Merrill describes it, the board's voices proceed "at a smart clip, perhaps six hundred words an hour," leaving a whir of unbroken text, for the most part devoid of even the most rudimentary tonal cues that spacing, shifts in case, and punctuation might provide, and lacking clear side-text or formatting that would indicate a change in speakers.[109] Confronted with these "drunken lines of capitals lurching across the page, gibberish until they're divided up into words and sentences," the immediate task facing the Ouija's mediums, then, is discerning—after the fact and already at secondhand—the spirits' message and its tone.[110] In an interview, Jackson recalls that "practically every time, sure, we

talked it over, the whole thing, how it had come through. Sometimes we talked over what we thought the tone was. Very often Jimmy would get things wrong." To the question, "You found that the hardest thing to 'get,' then, was not the message itself, but its tone?" Jackson answers in the affirmative, explaining, "Because the tone's a voice. . . . [T]he thing that was always one of the problems to talk over afterwards was, Did you feel that was said in this voice? Or, didn't Wystan seem surprised?"[111]

This compositional problem permeates the poem itself. Each volume's presiding spirit, for example, is grasped first, if tentatively, in terms of tone. JM and DJ puzzle over, and delight in, the contrast between Ephraim's "tone/We trusted most, a smiling Hellenistic/Lightness from beyond the grave," and "the tone we trusted not one bit./Must *everything* be witty?" (15, 17). Mirabell "[d]istinguishes himself" from among the bat-angels by his newfound use of punctuation, "tinkering symbols known/Not in themselves, but through effects on tone" by which he "strikes a note we've missed,/Clerkly but eager, glad to be with *us*" (129). (Auden later admits to being "BAFFLED BY THIS CHANGE IN TONE" [175].) And in *Scripts*, the litterateurs assembled for the angels' demanding lessons take comfort in the sense that "THE TONE" of their instructors' often "OBSCURE . . . TEXTS" is, Auden finds, "FAR MORE SHAKESPEARIAN THAN BIBLICAL" (420). Merrill and Jackson's efforts to "get" the Ouija's tone are most closely mirrored in the poem when, following God Biology's song—an eerily looping text rendered by JM in ten lines of ten-syllable syllabics—an entire section is devoted to reading the transcript and "talk[ing] over what we thought the tone was." "PLAINTIVE? AFFIRMATIVE?" asks Auden. "He's singing to the Pantheon," JM offers. "OR ALONE/KEEPING UP HIS NERVE ON A LIFERAFT," Auden proposes (362). This guessing at tone continues at length, focusing, Auden insists,

> UPON THE SOUND ITSELF THOSE TONES WERE EITHER
> THOSE OF AN ETERNAL V WORK OR A MACHINE
> SET TO LAST UNTIL THE BATTERIES
> RUN DOWN OR . . . ? Did the tones heard correspond
> To what you read just now? EXACT SYLLABICS:
> THERE IS A LANGUAGE ARE WE ON TO SOMETHING?
> CAN WE MAKE SENSE OF IT? (363)

These questions—is the proper tone poetic, mechanical, or something else entirely?—suggest a radical and absorbing uncertainty ("ARE WE ON TO

SOMETHING? / CAN WE MAKE SENSE OF IT?"). For Merrill, given the "unprecedented way in which the material came," such that "DJ and I never knew until it had been spelled out letter by letter," tonal uncertainty *itself* became a tone as "what I felt about the material became a natural part of the poem."[112] If, as I contended in this chapter's opening, *Sandover* is partly a poem about the idea of lyric, we might say more specifically that its lyric gossip is focused on tone at a time when the concept, its underlying assumption of a subjective interiority, and the lyric genre as commonly defined in terms of this interiority's expression had in many quarters fallen out of favor.

By 1988 Merrill could refer in a lecture to "what we used to call tone—the shades of mood and manner implied by this or that way of speaking," but when he began to consult the Ouija in the early 1950s, tone presented a dominant lens for reading poetry.[113] I. A. Richards in *Practical Criticism* identifies tone as one of "four kinds of meaning" at work in literary—indeed *all*—language, asserting that "many of the secrets of 'style' could, I believe, be shown to be matters of tone, of the perfect recognition of the writer's relation to the reader in view of what is being said and their joint feelings about it."[114] Such claims anticipate the prevailing mode of interpreting poems during the postwar period, when the tenets of the New Criticism were widely implemented in the university classroom. In *The Fields of Light*, for example, a 1951 study that models the methods of reading practiced in his classes at Amherst (and later Harvard), Reuben Brower foregrounds the analysis of tone, drawing on Richards but also on Robert Frost's related poetics of what he sometimes called "sentence sounds," or "the sound of sense." Taking as an epigraph for his chapter entitled "The Speaking Voice" Frost's statement that "sentences are not different enough to hold the attention unless they are dramatic. . . . All that can save them is the speaking tone of voice somehow entangled in the words and fastened to the page for the ear of the imagination," Brower avers: "Every poem is 'dramatic' in Frost's sense: someone is speaking to someone else."[115] The "analysis of tone," for Brower, accordingly demands that the reader "delineate the exact speaking voice in every poem we read."[116] And the poet's job is to shape the poem so as to fasten this voice definitively to the page. As Frost explains in his correspondence, "A sentence *must* convey a meaning by tone of voice and it must be the particular meaning the writer intended. The reader must have no choice in the matter. The tone of voice and its meaning must be in black and white on the page."[117]

Merrill was on intimate terms with these ideas of poetic tone, having studied at Amherst with Brower (who in fact advised Merrill's "honors thesis on Proust" and cites it twice in *The Fields of Light*).[118] In an interview years later, Merrill fondly recalls "a course at Amherst that Reuben Brower gave. I now see it was chiefly a course in tone, in putting meaning and the sound of meaning back into words," and he concurs when asked whether "Frost's idea of 'sentence sounds' " is "more or less relevant to what you're saying."[119] In *A Different Person* he further evokes "all I had learned about 'tone' from my teachers" at Amherst, as well as from "the presence on campus, twice yearly, of Mr. Frost and *his* campaign for the sound of sense" (461). Frost's "campaign" emphasizes that although poetic tone, or "the sound of sense," "is only there for those who have heard it previously in conversation," it is not simply a transcription of conversational tones of voice but instead takes shape as these tones come into tension with meter.[120] "Sentence sounds" are captured "fresh from talk, where they grow spontaneously," but these tones "are only lovely when thrown and drawn and displayed across spaces of the footed line": indeed, "if one is to be a poet he must learn to get cadences by skillfully breaking the sounds of sense with all their irregularity of accent across the regular beat of the metre."[121] JM's reference to *Sandover* as "this net of loose talk tightening to verse" accurately describes Frost's "sound of sense," and, like Frost's, Merrill's formalist verse deploys meter as a grid against which to display *Sandover*'s different voices—humans and ghosts speak in iambic pentameter, for example, while the bat-angels use fourteeners (85). Discussing "voice"—"the democratic word for 'tone' "—in an interview, Merrill contends, "I notice voice a good deal more in metrical poetry. . . . If Frost had written free verse, I don't think we'd have heard as much of the voice in it."[122]

" 'Tone,' " Merrill maintains, "always sounds snobbish, but without a sense of it how one flounders!"[123] Yet, by the early 1970s, when Merrill began the project that would become *Sandover*, he was also well aware of how an expectation of tone might just as easily evoke uncertain floundering. During these years, an increasing distrust of lyric's "speaking voice" and the subjective interiority this voice was taken to presume (misgivings often ascribed by critics to historical and aesthetic shifts of the 1970s including, but by no means limited to, the wake of Watergate, Vietnam, poststructuralist theories of language, and the emergence of Language poetry) reflected what Langdon Hammer calls, as I noted in my opening, a "historical difference in the confidence with which we understand other people's interiority and

communicate our own." Hammer argues that this "reduction in poetry's perceived potential to represent complexity of feeling, mood, stance—all that Brower and Richards once spoke of under the rubric of tone"—presents "a key problem in American poetry since the 1970s," one "which comes down to a general uncertainty about how to represent inner, mental and emotional experience."[124] Such uncertainty jars against the certain claims that tone "*must* convey . . . the particular meaning the writer intended," leaving the reader "no choice in the matter," or that one must "delineate the exact speaking voice in every poem we read." It accords, however, with Merrill's experience of tone, as both a reader and writer, in the composition of *Sandover*, which brings the problem of conveying and apprehending "inner, mental and emotional experience" to the fore but also raises the more fundamental problem—especially for a "ghostwritten" poem—of distinguishing interior from exterior emotion. In a poem in which, as Jackson attests, Ephraim's "tone" was "immediately suspected as our own tone," how does one begin to determine whose voice, meaning, and emotion are being conveyed?[125] In a discussion of tone as a more general aesthetic concept—"a cultural object's affective bearing, orientation, or 'set toward' the world"—Sianne Ngai argues that the problem of such uncertainty is not an obstacle for but *a constitutive part of* tone, "such that to resolve or eliminate the problem would be to nullify the concept or render it useless for theoretical work."[126] Ngai notes that "because tone is never entirely reducible to a reader's emotional response to a text or reducible to the text's internal representations of feeling (though it can amplify and be amplified by both), the problem it poses for analysis is strikingly similar to the problem posed by uncertainties concerning a feeling's subjective or objective status" (29–30). "Tone," she observes, "*is* the dialectic of objective and subjective feeling that our aesthetic encounters inevitably produce" (30).

Ngai's assertion that the concept of tone draws on and is "even constructed around" the difficulty of distinguishing exterior from interior formulations, objective from subjective feeling—what Eliot in *Sandover* might call texts that others write and those that are one's own—helps clarify Merrill's formal and philosophical engagement with the extreme tonal ambiguities of the Ouija's language (30). This language accentuates what Ngai suggests "we might think of as tone's greatest adversary in the domain of philosophical aesthetics": the idea, often referred to as "projection," that "what a critic calls 'tone' is simply a subject's emotion-based appraisal of an artwork, treated *as if* it were an intrinsic property of the work itself" (82). Ngai writes,

"There is a sense in which tone resembles the concept of collective mood frequently invoked by historians ('Cold War paranoia' and so forth)," and as she repeatedly turns to "certain kinds of ugly feeling," like paranoia, to illustrate the concept of tone, its uncertainties take on the negative contours of this affect (43, 28). Paranoia, like tone and the projection that shadows it, "forefronts the question of how to adequately distinguish our own constructions from those which construct us"; and like tone's definitive confusions, "confusion about feeling's objective or subjective status becomes *inherent* to the feeling" of paranoia, here compelling us to ask, "Is the enemy *out there* or *in me*?" (317, 19).

We have seen how this question asserts itself in *Sandover*, a Cold War poem that embodies the figure of the nuclear annihilation it sets out to prevent and in which Merrill is, as David Kalstone writes, "bombarded by voices of extinction using *his* words and *his* pages."[127] These same voices might make of the poet a mere "medium / Blankly uttering someone else's threat" in a "ghostwritten" poem (is the poetry *out there* or *in me*?). But for Merrill such multivalent uncertainty, if at first disconcerting, quickly becomes a form of pleasure spun out of the threads of postwar paranoia and authorial anxiety. *Mirabell* in fact includes a sonnet whose subject is projection, or "the sentimental fallacy," in which JM declares, "It's hopeless, the way people try / To avoid the sentimental fallacy— / How can a person not personify?" "Putting it into words," he accepts, "Means also that it puts words into me" (172). Jackson states, "Whether all that dictation came out of our collective subconscious or not finally became less and less of real interest," and when asked, "Could not the 'they' who move the teacup around the board be considered the authors of the poems?" Merrill blithely equivocates, using the idiom of the Ouija: "Well, yes and no."[128] *Sandover* does not seek to resolve so much as fully inhabit the problem of tone.

This is a stance for which gossip—seemingly autonomous talk that floats in and out of the bodies that perform and invariably alter it, thriving on and producing ambiguities of agency and interiority—proves instructive. *Sandover*'s tone is steeped in gossip: the inverted teacup from which the poem's mediums, as Merrill writes, "sip . . . this warm, unsweetened tone" is *spilling the tea*, after all (101). What Sedgwick calls the "nonce-taxonomic work represented by gossip" pursues, like the analysis of poetic tone, nuanced accounts of others, similarly providing, as we have seen in her account of gossip, the "necessary skills for making, testing, and using unrationalized and provisional hypotheses about what *kinds of people* there are to be found

in one's world."[129] And, like the tonal uncertainty Ngai argues is produced by "our aesthetic encounters," gossip's sharp pursuit of particularity is also often imagined as producing an indistinct, atonal hum: chatter, buzz, clucking, cackling, murmurs. From the salon (packed "CHOCKFULL OF STARRY GOSSIP & WE ROAR") to the schoolroom (where we "HAVE SEEN & HEARD THE BUSY SECRETS BUZZING"), the ambient, atonal tone of gossip's "provisional hypotheses" characterizes much of *Sandover*'s soundscape (386, 455). More, the poem's tonal uncertainty serves, like gossip, as a positive figure for the poem's queer reproduction: explaining "THE CHILDLESSNESS WE SHARE," Mirabell proclaims,

> THE LOVE
> U EXPERIENCE IS NOT THE STRAIGHTFORWARD FRONTAL LOVE
> MANY READERS INFER & YET OUR V WORK MUST SING OUT
> PAEANS TO THE GREENHOUSE THO WE OURSELVES ARE (M) TONE DEAF
> (216)

Announcing his metaphor with his characteristic "(M)," Mirabell here explains homosexuality ("NOT THE STRAIGHTFORWARD," normative form of "LOVE / MANY READERS INFER") as a propensity toward tonal instability ("WE OURSELVES ARE . . . TONE DEAF") that paradoxically provides the basis for *Sandover*'s queer, life-affirming song (or what the poem "MUST SING OUT").

Merrill's turn to gossip as an occasion and method for thinking about the formal, historical, and philosophical aspects of the problem of tone thus might seem to indicate a break from the more narrowly focused poetics he had learned from teachers like Brower or Frost, for whom tone of voice "must be positive, strong, and definitely and unmistakably indicated."[130] But it is more an exuberant reimagining of this poetics, in line with Merrill's mischievously placing Frost in queer contexts, as when *Sandover* stages an erotic encounter between a hypnotized DJ, possessed by Ephraim, and JM, "[i]n a white farmhouse up a gravel road / Where Frost had visited" (26), or when the Ouija transcripts elaborate a ludicrously bawdy fantasy out of the anecdote of Frost's calling on Ezra Pound in his Kensington flat, only to discover him exotically perched in a tiny portable bathtub.[131] For Frost, too, draws on gossip in formulating his poetics of tone. In a series of letters articulating his efforts to get into his poems "the sound of sense," Frost links these efforts to a love of gossip. He hints at this link in his suggestion that "the best place to get the abstract sound of sense is from voices behind a

door that cuts off the words," a scene of eavesdropping that recalls Mill's influential definition of lyric poetry as overheard utterance.[132] But whereas for Mill the poet is overheard, as if lyric is the stuff of gossip, for Frost the poet overhears, making verse out of gossip. The ear for gossip implied in such poetic overhearing becomes overt in a later letter in which, after first claiming that his "conscious interest in people was at first no more than an almost technical interest in their speech—in what I used to call their sentence sounds—the sound of sense," Frost admits:

> I was interested in neighbors for more than merely their tones of speech—and always had been. I remember about when I began to suspect myself of liking their gossip for its own sake. I justified myself by the example of Napoleon as recently I have had to justify myself in seasickness by the example of Nelson.
>
> I like the actuality of gossip, the intimacy of it. Say what you will effects of actuality and intimacy are the greatest aim an artist can have.[133]

Frost's discovery of a latent, "suspect" interest in a culturally feminized gossip must be "justified," even in the relatively private space of a personal letter—and so the somewhat joking invocation of masculine, military strength that becomes the dead serious summoning of the poetic "artist" and his assertive "aim." Despite such anxious justification, though, the surprising sense remains that for Frost the vernacular of gossip, both in its abstract "tones of speech" *and* its "actuality and intimacy," presents a viable paradigm for modern poetic production. And more than simply viable: in a 1956 lecture, Frost not only celebrates "gossip," which "may be defined as our guessing at each other," but avows that "gossip exalts in poetry. Poetry is the top of our guessing at each other. . . . The beauty of gossip is that it is the whole of our daily life. It has flashes of insight. The height of imagination is there."[134]

The "height of imagination," the "top of our guessing at each other"—Frost's claim for poetry as exalted gossip returns us to his "sound of sense." In this context, the "hundreds of old and new categorical imaginings concerning all the kinds it may take to make up a world" that Sedgwick ascribes to gossip reverberate with Frost's impossible taxonomic efforts to capture, "fresh from talk," "boasting tones and quizzical tones and shrugging tones . . . and forty eleven other tones" that perhaps "could be collected in a book though I don't at present see on what system they would be catalogued."[135] Like his admission of his tangled interests in "tones of speech" and "gossip for its own sake," Frost's "sound of sense," gleaned "from voices behind a

door that cuts off the words," suggests tone as apprehended by a kind of gossip: what we make out of the little bit we can catch of others' interior experience behind the closed door of private subjectivity. Cut off from the interiority presumed to be behind that door, the poet's gossipy speculation perhaps fastens to the page his or her own tone and the interiority it implies as much as that of any supposed other in the adjacent room, and this uncertainty of objective and subjective feeling, third- and first-person experience, anticipates the reader's own relation to the poem, which presents another presumed interiority accessible merely as a disembodied voice we can guess at. Where only a resonant space can be confirmed, we imagine the depth of subjectivity; and in concentrating on this slippage between spaces and subjectivities, Frost's figure for the "sound of sense" presents tone as a form of gossip that reproduces the unverifiable ideal of lyric interiority.

Gossip in the House of Poetry

Like Frost's poet making sense—and song—out of voices from which he or she is cut off, *Sandover*'s principal medium absorbs, as Auden sees it, "A PLAY OF VOICES FOR / U MY BOY IN SOLITUDE TO SCORE" (137). And, like Frost's, Merrill's gossip about lyric interiority recurs to architectural metaphors to portray the uncertain effects of tone, calling poetry, for example, a "vast chamber full of voices."[136] In an essay entitled "Acoustical Chambers," published the same year *Sandover* was completed, Merrill writes that "interior spaces, the shape and correlation of rooms in a house, have always appealed to me" and speculates that "this fondness for given arrangements might explain how instinctively I took to quatrains, to octaves and sestets, when I began to write poems. 'Stanza' is after all the Italian word for 'room.' "[137] Blurring interior spaces and the interiorities with which they echo, Merrill describes his endeavors to fasten to the page his world's complex "inflections" and speaking "tones" as requiring "magical places real or invented, like . . . Sandover, acoustical chambers so designed as to endow the weariest platitude with resonance and depth."[138] *Sandover*'s inventive design includes the "given arrangements" of inset verse forms (couplets, terza rima, sonnets, a villanelle, a canzone, and an array of nonce forms), meters indicating voices of diverse ontologies, page layout (the indented left margin of *Mirabell*'s human and ghostly voices or the dramatic side-text that appears in *Scripts*), and typography (the shifts between small caps and lowercase text, or roman and italicized type, which distinguish speakers *and* the particular recesses from which their voices emanate, whether on earth or in the board's

virtual world)—an elaborate poetic architecture of interior spaces whose "resonance and depth" animate, yet without ever verifying, the presence of its various species of disembodied voices. These "acoustical chambers," both formally carved out in the poem *Sandover* and self-reflexively represented as part of the manor house Sandover, comprise spaces of poetry in which gossip exalts and spaces of everyday gossip about exalted poetry.[139]

Consider the poem's well-known "ROSEBRICK MANOR" speech, in which Auden rebukes JM's idyllic wish to return to lyric's "private life, to my own words": "CAN U STILL BE BENT," asks an incredulous WHA, "ON DOING YR OWN THING: EACH TEENY BIT / MADE PERSONAL (PARDON MME) AS SHIT?" (261, 262). He continues,

> THINK WHAT A MINOR
> PART THE SELF PLAYS IN A WORK OF ART
> COMPARED TO THOSE GREAT GIVENS THE ROSEBRICK MANOR
> ALL TOPIARY FORMS & METRICAL MOAT
> RIPPLING UNSOUNDED! FROM ANTHOLOGIZED
> PERENNIALS TO HERB GARDEN OF CLICHES
> FROM LATIN-LABELED HYBRIDS TO THE FAWN
> 4 LETTER FUNGI THAT ENRICH THE LAWN,
> IS NOT ARCADIA TO DWELL AMONG
> GREENWOOD PERSPECTIVES OF THE MOTHER TONGUE
> ROOTSYSTEMS UNDERFOOT WHILE OVERHEAD
> THE SUN GOD SANG & SHADES OF MEANING SPREAD
> & FAR SNOWCAPPED ABSTRACTIONS GLITTERED NEAR
> OR FAIRLY MELTED INTO ATMOSPHERE?
> AS FOR THE FAMILY ITSELF MY DEAR
> JUST GAPE UP AT THAT CORONETED FRIEZE:
> SWEET WILLIAMS & FATE-FLAVORED EMILIES
> THE DOUBTING THOMAS & THE DULCET ONE
> (HARDY MY BOY WHO ELSE? & CAMPION)
> MILTON & DRYDEN OUR LONG JOHNS IN SHORT
> IN BED AT PRAYERS AT MUSIC FLUSHED WITH PORT
> THE DULL THE PRODIGAL THE MEAN THE MAD
> IT WAS THE GREATEST PRIVILEGE TO HAVE HAD
> A BARE LOWCEILINGED MAID'S ROOM AT THE TOP (262)

Imagining English poetic tradition as a manor house—"*Sandover, that noble rosebrick manor*" (319)—Auden's conceit downplays the "SELF" by empha-

sizing the House of Poetry it contingently inhabits, and the "GREAT GIVENS" of form, meter, and varieties of diction that together make up the estate's grounds. His speech presents a series of opposed perspectives and inversions—"OVERHEAD" and "UNDERFOOT," "FAR" and "NEAR," "LONG" and "SHORT"—and a voice that similarly contrasts a heightened poetic diction and syntax ("RIPPLING UNSOUNDED," "IS NOT ARCADIA TO DWELL AMONG") with the everyday phrasing of idle talk ("MY DEAR," "JUST GAPE UP," "MY BOY," "IN SHORT"). What starts in the elevated, distant tone of a guided tour through this allegorical landscape—although Auden is addressing JM, the rhetorical question posed in this voice takes into account no particular auditor—gradually shifts into a more personal, conversational register ("AS FOR THE FAMILY ITSELF MY DEAR"), which we recognize as that of gossip about the goings on ("IN BED AT PRAYERS AT MUSIC FLUSHED WITH PORT") of the estate's occupants ("THE DULL THE PRODIGAL THE MEAN THE MAD"). This tonal contrast sustains the ultimate inversion of the figure at the bottom of the manor's social hierarchy ascending to its very "TOP," a shift in importance that we might view as the figure of the gossip supplanting the lyric "SELF," now demoted to "A MINOR / PART." And given gossip's long (and often literary) association with women and servants, Auden's revealing that this passage's voice and its increasingly relaxed discretion figuratively belongs to the inhabitant of the manor's "MAID'S ROOM" positions his speech specifically as servant's gossip about the House of Poetry, which, by the passage's end, more and more resembles the House of Fame.

This seems to have been a voice and a conceit Merrill was drawn to: we find another gossipy tour of poetic tradition in an earlier occasional poem that—although yet to be identified as such—serves as precursor for Auden's "ROSEBRICK MANOR" speech. Appearing in the September 26, 1963, *New York Review of Books* under the pseudonym Raoul Marx, "Poets at Home" ostensibly presents a review in verse of the recent anthology *The Modern Poets*. Its speaker, host for the at-home suggested by the title, immediately welcomes us:

> Yoo-hoo! This way, dear reader, I so hoped
> You'd find us. We have neither *Sward* nor *Bowers*
> Nor imaginary *Gardons*, yet a peasant *Plath*
> *Wilbur*ing you through *Ciardi* perennials of many
> *Hughes* to our—hardly a *Villa*, more a *Warren*.
> For fine old *Holmes* you'll have to look elsewhere.[140]

Through puns and spoonerisms that anticipate the multiple meanings and inversions of the rosebrick manor's allegorical landscape and its use of proper names, the speaker's tour of this particular House of Poetry doubles as lively gossip about who's in and who's out of the anthology's literary circle. Here, for example, are "neither [Robert] *Sward* nor [Edgar] *Bowers*," and no "imaginary *Gardons*"—a reference to S. S. Gardons, a pen name used by W. D. Snodgrass, who (a real toad?) *is* included in *The Modern Poets*. When it comes time for the salon's "tête-à-*Tate*" this gossip becomes plain, the house's symbolism giving way to sheer dish about the minor parts played by assorted selves in the world of art:

> Yes, we're all here.
> Tomlinson? Ginsberg? Meredith? Great *Scott*,
> How names like that *Kinsella* line beats me.
> Why, any *Lehmann* will tell you—Beg your pardon?
> *Miles* is as good as *Amis*? Ha, that's *Rich*! (812)

Here, poetry and poetic reputation circulate via a network of proper "names" that recall highlighted items in a gossip column as much as an anthology's table of contents. And although this poem is signed with a self-effacing pseudonym, our host's relentless literary dish can be traced, as in WHA's embodiment of the feminized figure of the gossip, to one name and source in particular, "That shallow, *Merrill*y chattering stream" (812).

Reading Auden's "ROSEBRICK MANOR" speech with "Poets at Home" in mind does more than just bolster the overlooked, gossipy aspect of its tone. Critics have generally understood Auden's manor house of tradition to be, as Gwiazda writes, "cohabited by the writers of the past."[141] But the presence of these writers is ambiguous, and they often seem less inhabitants than *parts of* the House of Poetry, just as the salon of "Poets at Home" more accurately figures its poets *as* home, components of a resounding architecture of gossip and poetry, from the "peasant *Plath*" and "*Ciardi* perennials" of the landscape to "the simple *Hall*" in whose mirror we see reflected "a door marked/*T. ELIOT*—that's where we got our training" (812). When Auden compares "THE SELF" to the "GREAT GIVENS" of "THE ROSEBRICK MANOR," the individual's "MINOR" part morphs, through rhyme, into the autonomous features of the "MANOR" itself. And though "THE FAMILY" seems, at first blush, to include "writers of the past"—Shakespeare and Dickinson, Hardy and Campion, Milton and Dryden—who live within the manor, these figures appear not as individuals but as architectural detail, their names

doubling as flowers in the design of the space's "CORONETED FRIEZE." Rather than a family tree, this frieze's notably plural "WILLIAMS," "EMILIES," "THOMAS[ES]," and "JOHNS" indicate a taxonomy of *types* of poets, much like the taxonomy of rhetorical flowers we find in the estate's garden. Even Auden's reputed presence in the manor emerges, like his voice, as an effect of the "MAID'S ROOM," that particular "acoustical chamber" he claims to have inhabited.

The gossip of the "ROSEBRICK MANOR" speech tells JM—and us—that what we hear "IN A WORK OF ART" is not a lyric "SELF" but a resonant formal space. Part of an allegorical landscape in which "TOPIARY" equals verse forms, "MOAT" equals meter, "PERENNIALS" equal poetic touchstones, the "HERB GARDEN" equals clichés, and so on, the "MANOR" itself, I suggest, equals manner, or tone.[142] Beginning with I. A. Richards's linking of "manners" and "tone," the analysis of poetic tone has involved reference to manners as social behavior, one's attitude toward others.[143] For Merrill, a student of this tradition, "It's hard to imagine a work of literature that doesn't depend on manners, at least negatively," and such "manners—whether good or bad—are entirely allied with tone or voice in poetry."[144] The manor house of poetry, in Auden's punning speech, is accordingly a House of Tones: "SWEET" tones and "FATE-FLAVORED" and "DOUBTING" and "DULCET" and what Frost might call "forty eleven other tones." The term "tone" also has visual meaning, as in the general effect of color or of light, and *The Changing Light at Sandover* thus announces itself as a series of represented and formal spaces in whose constantly changing light "SHADES"—ghosts, tones—"OF MEANING SPREAD," producing "ghostwritten" texts, pregnant with gradations of meaning their "TONE DEAF" mediums cannot conceive, and promising unforeseeable transformations of tone, of the depth and hue of the poem's protean voices. Such tones suggest "provisional hypotheses" about lyric selves whose interiorities are never certain but no less powerful for that. As Merrill remarks of manners, "One could paraphrase Marianne Moore: using them with a perfect contempt for them, one discovers in them after all a place for the genuine."[145]

In *Sandover*, Merrill engages tone with a perfect contempt for it. The poem lays bare the problems of poetic tone, interrogating the uncertain "PART THE SELF PLAYS IN A WORK OF ART," the difficulties of distinguishing between subjective and objective feeling, the powerful illusions of lyric interiority. Yet the "ROSEBRICK MANOR" speech, supposedly a rebuke of JM's wish to return to "my own words," is in fact, Merrill admits, one of "only

a few places where I presume to pass 'my own words' off as a message from the other world. The showiest is Wystan's evocation of the manor house (*Mirabell*, 9.1). It came welling up from me one afternoon, instead of from the Board. I never again felt so 'possessed.'"[146] For all the uncertainties of tone and the seemingly irresolvable questions of agency, interiority, authorship, and tradition such uncertainty implies, Merrill is "STILL . . . BENT" on the "private life" of "my own words"—but as they emerge as gossip from within lyric's "acoustical chambers." Here, he seems to echo Eliot in *Sandover*, whose gossip, in asserting that the "WORKS" that "OTHERS 'WRITE' . . . ARE YET ONE'S OWN," evinces a desire for a lyric subjectivity that he knows is an impossible desire and yet pursues all the more because of it. "Freedom to be oneself," Merrill writes in *A Different Person*, "is all very well; the greater freedom is not to be oneself" (565). Putting pressure on the problem of poetic tone, Merrill's Ouija poem demystifies lyric's subjective interiority even as its gossip discovers in this space of interiority queer room for a "self," to recall Merrill's words, "much stranger and freer and more far-seeing than the one you thought you knew."

Coda

Status Update

This book has revolved around the ways that four quite differently influential American poets reimagined the ideas and uses of the modern lyric genre by turning to the queer art of gossip. Over the last four chapters, I have explored how the unauthorized voices and selves of their poems often arise from represented and formal spaces of gossip: recall how the salon and stanzas of Stein's *Stanzas* present social and stylistic rooms that house her poem's pervasive dish; how the gossipy Harlem sites of stoop, curb, and street corner foster obscure vocal echoes and provide running social commentary in Hughes's *Montage*; how O'Hara's poetry at times talks to itself *as* a queer, urban space of gossip; and how Merrill's use of the Ouija board in *Sandover* conceives a world and an architecture from which the tones of his disembodied, otherworldly gossip emanates. Beyond their poems, the reputations and iconography of these poets are bound up with spaces of gossip: think of the many photographs of Stein posed in her famously dishy residence at 27 rue de Fleurus; the portrait of Hughes on the stoop of his Harlem home while a series of conversations dotting the streetscape behind him recede into the distance; the image of O'Hara on the telephone, midchat in one of his well-documented Manhattan apartments; or pictures of Merrill's memorable dining room at Stonington, its "witty" shade of paint and "turn of the century dome" providing the "[b]ackdrop" for his and David Jackson's séances and an acoustical chamber for the Ouija's gossipy voices from Sandover.[1] The iconographic force of these social spaces of gossip stems largely from the way they mirror, and are mirrored in, the poetic spaces of gossip each poet creates. Across these poets' work we find both a fantasy and poetic enactment of the transformative space of gossip, in which collected talk moves through the bodies that perform and inevitably

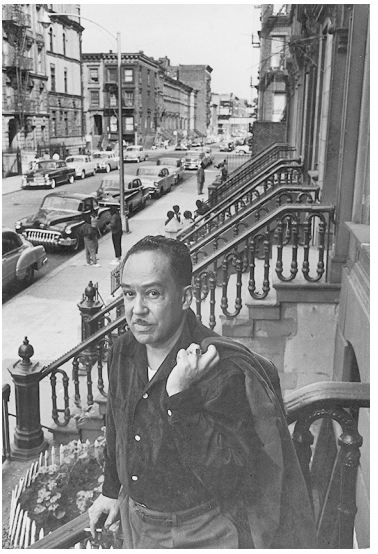
alter it, exploiting and producing ambiguities of agency and interiority that challenge conventional notions of the self.

In theorizing this emphasis on the gossip as a resonant *space* as much as or even more than an embodied figure, I have drawn on depictions of the classical goddess Fame and her home. While, as we have seen, the House of Fame serves as a seemingly totalizing archive of "every voice and word" ever spoken, this archive functions less as a fixed repository of knowledge belonging to or emitting from a divine authority than a disembodied pool of language that mutates as it is picked up and passed along from body to body. Gossip, that is, appears less a subjectivity than a space for the performance of subjectivities. As the House of Fame "reverberates,/Repeating voices, doubling what it hears,"

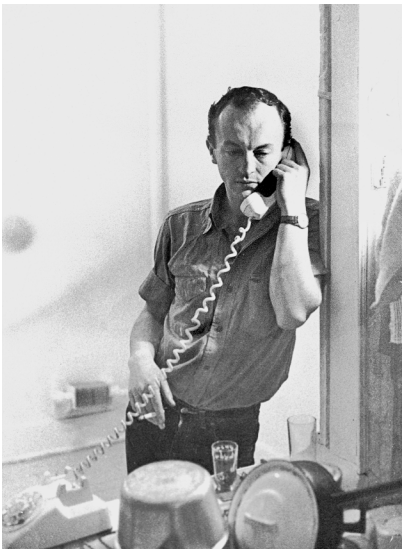
> rumours everywhere,
> Thousands, false mixed with true, roam to and fro,
> And words flit by and phrases all confused.
> Some pour their tattle into idle ears,
> Some pass on what they've gathered, and as each
> Gossip adds something new the story grows.
> Here is Credulity, here reckless Error,
> Groundless Delight, Whispers of unknown source,
> Sudden Sedition, overwhelming Fears.
> All that goes on in heaven or sea or land
> Rumour observes and scours the whole wide world.[2]

As a figure for idle talk, the House of Fame conveys how gossip preserves and multiplies selves and reputations yet can exist independently of a particular, embodied subjectivity. Significantly, the "overwhelming Fears" this undermining of stable interiority can produce are accompanied by a veritable orgy of "Groundless Delight," as free-floating "words" and "phrases" are whispered among a throng that takes pleasure in sourceless knowledge and the possibilities of its performance. Gossip, which belongs at once to everybody (what *everybody's saying*) and nobody in particular (*you didn't hear it from me*), allows for a simultaneous self-assertion and self-effacement, an extravagant stylistic performance into which the self might all but disappear but out of which it might also emerge. Peopling their poems—often ambivalently—with gossip's "Credulity," "Error," "Delight," and "Whispers" as they contemplate "Sedition" and "Fears," Stein, Hughes, O'Hara, and Merrill each

This Stanza Has Been Well-Known. Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas in the salon at 27 rue de Fleurus, 1922. Photograph by Man Ray. © Man Ray Trust/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris, 1922



Comment on Stoop. Langston Hughes on the stoop of his Harlem home, 1958. Photograph by Robert W. Kelley.



Something Like a Livable Space. Frank O'Hara on the telephone, 791 Broadway, 1965. Photograph by Mario Schifano. © 1965 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SIAE, Rome.

Acoustical Chamber. The dining room at Merrill's Stonington home, backdrop for many of *Sandover*'s Ouija sessions. Photograph by Elisa Rolle.

claim a strange and precarious agency within the dispossession of voicing and becoming the words of others.

In the new millennium, such bids for agency have become increasingly common. The ancient figure of the House of Fame persists in modern literature and culture, although now—at a time when the World Wide Web can seem almost to have literalized Fame's home and its measureless archive of "[a]ll that goes on in . . . the whole wide world"—it tends toward the realm of technology more than the divine. Concomitantly, poetry has seen a surge of interest in creating poems out of other people's words, especially as those words take up residence in the virtual and actual spaces of the web, the archive, the cellular talkscape, and communal forms like the pop song.[3] Twenty-first century conceptual poets appropriate and reframe existing texts. "Flarf" poets use Google or other Internet search engines to dredge up the worst of Internet vernacular and then sculpt this raw material into poetry. Erasure poets efface selections of existing texts until new poems emerge. Docupoets incorporate and reframe textual and visual documentation and archival materials in their poems. And a diverse number of poets not typically or exclusively associated with these poetic practices selectively employ existing text, found language, and documentation in various poems. Although the source language for many of these poetic projects does not originate online, the omnipresent experience of the digital era's unprecedented linguistic archive seems to play a decisive, motivating role in this century's trend toward poetries made from other people's words. Poets who take up other people's language echo in their poems the challenges—to originality, to the individual voice, to privacy, to autonomy, to decorum—faced by anyone living amid this century's vast quantity of talk and text, and, like other poets before them, they too turn to gossip to think through the thorny aesthetic and ethical stakes of tapping into communal, mediated language.

While the pervasiveness of such poetry and the technologies often supporting it may be new, its techniques usually are not: critics have been quick to place these works of what Marjorie Perloff calls "unoriginal genius" in traditions of collage-based, documentary, procedural, and aleatory practices that run from at least modernism to the present.[4] To these traditions I would add the twentieth-century history of lyric gossip. Gossip should be a keyword for the inquiry into recent poetries of appropriated language, not simply since so many of these poems—in drawing on the talk of online chat rooms, comments sections, blogs, celebrity gossip sites, and the like—

incorporate gossip but more significantly because, as we have seen in the work of Stein, Hughes, O'Hara, and Merrill, the influence of gossip's style, with its expertise in performing and recirculating the words of others, can be perceived even in the absence of gossipy subject matter. Lytle Shaw contends that "the longer one spends in the infinite, interweaving cul-de-sacs of intertextuality" that characterize poetries like Flarf and the web more generally, "the quainter the old-fashioned divisions become between interior and exterior, subject and object, public and private."[5] These quaint divisions have long been the concern of lyric gossip's avowedly minor, queer poetics, and as such "old-fashioned divisions" become more and more central to a wide variety of poetries, this marginal tradition's negotiations of them provide an invaluable resource—and important reminder of their exclusionary contours—for contemporary poets.

To my mind, then, the best of these poets speak not only to the stylistic possibilities of digital-era poetry but also to the significant queer experiments in gossip and the lyric that anticipate them. I conclude this study with four short discussions of such poets, retracing the innovations and stakes of Stein's, Hughes's, O'Hara's, and Merrill's lyric gossip and suggesting some of the ways their work has been updated within contemporary spaces of gossip. Like good gossip, these discussions are speculative rather than exhaustive and interested in curious detail more than broad generalization. They aim to insinuate how the distinctive writing of Juliana Spahr, John Keene, Eileen Myles, and D. A. Powell both extends and helps to illuminate how poets over the past century have made significant use of the gossip that swirls about them and their work, writing poems that shrewdly anticipate the precarity and possibilities of the self in a world of information overload, unimagined archival access, smartphones, and social media and the rising value of gossip as strategic, provisional, self- and community-making performance.

Yous and They: Juliana Spahr

My first chapter explored how Gertrude Stein turned to the objectifying I/They relationship of gossip to reconfigure the social scene of lyric address, imagining how the painful exclusion from that scene might be made to produce its own intimate pleasures and odd forms of agency. Juliana Spahr's celebrated 2005 collection *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs* notably builds on Stein's experiments with the speaking *to* of address and the speaking *of* of gossip, each with its accompanying drama of pronouns. Spahr often

employs the repetition and complex simplicity of Stein, whose work she has written about as foundational to her thinking about poetry. In the introduction to her critical study *Everybody's Autonomy*, Spahr frankly admits, "Mainly, this book is an attempt to figure out my own story, to understand what happened when I was in high school and found Stein's work in an anthology of twentieth-century writing and everything that I thought I knew about reading changed."[6] The impact specifically of Stein's lyric gossip on Spahr can be registered everywhere from her play with naming names in the recent poem "Turnt" to her prose collaboration with David Buuck, *An Army of Lovers*, which revolves around the conversation of two "mediocre poets" who "thought of themselves as living life in pursuit of both the intellectual and the social pleasures of poetry," engaging in talk that "could probably best be described as gossip, although it was also about poems and poetry."[7] But this impact is perhaps exemplified most distinctly in "Poem Written from November 30, 2002, to March 27, 2003," an anti-war poem which occupies more than sixty pages in *This Connection* and documents, in fifteen dated entries, the buildup to and immediate aftermath of the 2003 invasion of Iraq as backdrop to American daily life, simply another part of what the poem calls "the stuff of the everyday in this world" and its "unanswerable questions of political responsibility."[8]

During this disquieting period, Spahr writes in a preface to the poem, "I felt I had to think about what I was connected with, and what I was complicit with," and she claims that "this feeling made lyric—with its attention to connection, with its dwelling on the beloved and on the afar—suddenly somewhat poignant, somewhat apt, even somewhat more useful than I usually find it" (13). In emphasizing the lyric's entrenched associations with both intimate connection *and* distance, the "beloved" and "the afar," Spahr gestures toward the modern assumption that the lyric works to create the illusion of intimate presence through figures of voice and address, and in particular toward lyric's paradigmatic address to an absent beloved, brought seemingly near by the act of calling. Despite an audible, post-Language skepticism ("*somewhat* poignant, *somewhat* apt, even *somewhat* more useful") toward this assumption and the power of lyric address to create intimacy out of distance, Spahr is determined to engage the lyric, sensing that the "attention to connection" at work in its form of address might help her to expose and inhabit, rather than obscure or disavow, the problems of "complicity." Accordingly, the most striking (and commented on) formal feature of Spahr's long poem is its peculiar, second-person plural address to

its "beloveds" or "yous": "Beloveds," Spahr writes in one entry, "yours skins is a boundary separating yous from the rest of yous" (19). This plural address adapts the strategies of the private love lyric to a collective scale, using the intimacy of lyric address in an impossibly ambitious global address to, as the title of her book puts it, "everyone with lungs." In this sense, the poem's lyric address becomes a way of trying—or usefully failing—to enact what the volume's jacket copy describes as a "planetary love poem."

Spahr's concerns with the public, collective uses of a seemingly outmoded and insular lyric have been well documented.[9] But along with and key to the poem's thinking about the lyric, there also remains a gossipy dimension to its second-person plural address. Those familiar with Spahr's mixed-genre memoir *The Transformation*, a 2007 prose work published "under the sign of poetry"[10] that details—among other things—her three-person, polyamorous relationship, will register a biographical context for this address and understand the poem's "yous" to refer as well, and perhaps more immediately, to two quite specific beloveds. (It's worth noting that *This Connection*'s dedication—"Thank yous to Bill Luoma and Charles Weigl for all sorts of help with these poems"—playfully embeds the biographical context for the poem's "yous" in the book itself, activating our appetite for gossip.) This queer address—I use queer, here, to indicate both the formal strangeness of Spahr's "yous" and their rarely remarked-upon basis in nonnormative sexuality—turns the lyric's affective economies inside out. Gossip brings into relief how Spahr's address to "yous" both turns inward, toward the personal, private, and domestic, and outward, toward publics including all of us, at once addressing—and thus confusing—intimates and strangers, or, as she later puts it, "the ones you love, those you've met and those you haven't" (47).

We can further see how gossip informs the strangely expansive intimacy of Spahr's address to "yous" in the context of *The Transformation*'s equally striking pronominal play. In my discussion of Stein, I wagered that *Stanzas in Meditation* is the most "they"-heavy poem in the English language, but the poetic prose of *The Transformation*, which narrates the experience of a Steinian "they," might give its predecessor a run for its money. Like *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Stanzas*, the twinned texts Stein wrote in 1932, Spahr's *This Connection* and *The Transformation* serve as companion pieces, engaged in a set of shared meditations on lyric and gossip. To understand Spahr's lyric address to "yous," we must also consider her gossipy narrative of "they," each of which uses awkward or unexpected pronouns to

invite us to acknowledge and skew our sense of how persons are recognized and figured forth. Technically, the "they" of *The Transformation* signals a third-person narration about three lovers and their personal and political transformation during the years 1997–2001. But that narration, completely focalized through *their* consciousness, reads more like an autobiographical first-person plural account. By telling her and her lovers' story *as if* someone else's, Spahr approaches—as does Stein in *The Autobiography* when she puts her story in the mouth of Toklas—gossip as circuitous autobiography. And, like Stein, Spahr ruminates on the perverse potential for agency within the limits of sexual alterity and the gossipy objectification that would make queer others a "they." Although the "they" of *The Transformation* "refused the word queer to describe themselves and they told themselves they did this out of respect because they were not sexually involved with people of the same gender," nonetheless their story is in part "a story about how they were shaped by perhaps being and perhaps not being perverts," or "a story of how they became aware they were a they in the cruel inquisitive sense, in the sense of not being a part of us or we, in the sense of accusation, whether they wanted to be they or not. It is a story of realizing that they cannot shrug off this they and so a story of trying to think with it."[11] The experience of being cruelly objectified by gossip, Spahr ventures, may also provide the conditions for thinking otherwise about persons, intimate connections, forms of social agency, and the genres that foster them: "They were, they are, defined by the just accusations of others and intimate with one another inside this accusation" (23).

A similar effort to find possibility within damage motivates Spahr's antiwar poem. Both it and its address shuttle between the emotional senses of connection as intimacy, or the sustaining sense that everyone and everything is connected, and, differently inflected, connection as paranoia, or the conspiratorial sense that everyone and everything is connected. The poem struggles to distinguish one form of connection from the other, both desiring and resisting a perhaps nourishing, perhaps naive intimacy and a perhaps astute, perhaps misguided paranoia. Spahr, as we have seen, overtly frames the exploration of these affective poles in relation to conceptions of the lyric, but the poem's engagement with gossip, also a source of potential connection and conspiracy, runs parallel to and informs this consideration of the lyric's social uses and limits at a time when "[t]he news refreshes every few minutes on the computer screen and on the television screen," but Spahr "suspect[s]" that this prodigious stream of information "is not

telling the necessary truths" (33). The daily rush of twenty-first century media—marked by its own blurrings of intimacy and paranoia, connection and complicity, privacy and publicity, the isolated individual and the networked collective—occasions the poem's recurring catalogues of world news headlines and celebrity gossip, which frequently seem to position poetry *against* gossip. "Today, on the radio," we are told, "Christie Brinkley exists and her worries about Billy Joel's driving abilities exist," just as "A lawsuit exists where Catherine Zeta Jones and Michael Douglas are suing *Hello!* magazine for publishing poor-quality wedding photos," but "neither light, nor certitude, nor peace exist" (51, 52). This allusion to Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" suggests, like Arnold's poem, a claim for the quiet of lyric intimacy as a stay against a world of noise, confusion, and violence. Our shallow appetite for fleeting celebrity gossip, the poem here implies, overwhelms—even threatens the conditions necessary for the existence of—the pursuit of poetry's more lasting news.

This view of gossip is complicated, though, as celebrity gossip's ability to create and distract a national public ("[w]hile we turned sleeping uneasily perhaps J Lo gave Ben a prenuptial demand for sex four times a week" [24]) is contrasted with something more like what Irit Rogoff has identified as "the mysterious power and mobility of gossip as it winds its way through subterranean and unacknowledged channels and continuously constitutes communities within its listeners."[12] Local gossip and its "rumors of ships refueling and of ships slipping out of port while we sleep in our bed, even as I can't see them in the news" seems to constitute just such a community:

> I hear rumors from mothers in the street talking to other mothers.
>
> I hear rumors from lovers in line at the grocery talking among themselves.
>
> I hear rumors from friends at parties.
>
> I hear rumors of ships refueling and of ships slipping out of port while we sleep in our bed, even as I can't see them in the news. (37)

These "rumors" that circulate among mothers, lovers, and friends suggest one way that the loose lips of this anti-war poem might, figuratively at least, sink ships. In some sense passages like this establish a good version of gossip (embodied, interactional, intimate) over and against the bad version represented by celebrity dish (mediated, transactional, alienating). But lines such as these also show, like Stein in *Stanzas* and *The Autobiography*, how intimate

and mediated gossip are less stark opposites than two points on a continuum: the gossip of "lovers in line at the grocery" may well convey *both* that "Winona Ryder has thirty prescriptions for downers from twenty different doctors and still a ship fuels up and slips out of port" (40). Indeed throughout the poem, singing birds, evocative of the trope of lyric birdsong as well as the little bird of gossip, serve as sources of news both significant and frivolous: "all we hear in the birds' songs is war," although "[t]he birds also sing of how celebrities in Los Angeles are getting their manicures and their hair done as they always do" (68). War, celebrity styling: as proponents of gossip's subversive powers often attest, its value resides not only in the information it circulates but also in the intimacies and counterpublics that circulation potentially engenders—the "unacknowledged channels" that convey the rumors and feelings we "can't see . . . in the news."

If, as Spahr laments to her beloveds, "we do not know how to live our lives with any agency outside of our bed," here the relationships effected by networks of gossip—even distracting or apparently valueless gossip—seem to hint at how such agency could be extended into the streets and the polis beyond the privileged sanctuary of the lovers' "bed." That bed, with its "loving" and "dreaming," and "the power" of its "combination of intimacy and isolation," functions in the poem as a repeated metonym for the traditional inwardness of the lyric and its limits (26). Spahr's lyric gossip thus tries to find a way to live not only within the perceived shame of gossip but also within a critique of the lyric. "Poem Written from November 30, 2002, to March 27, 2003" contends with and within gossip and the lyric, genres each constituted by a shared set of expectations and their attendant modes of social recognition. But for Spahr these genres and their frustrations are less fixed targets of critique than social arrangements—arrangements in which we might be complicit, but whose failures hold out the possibility of different ways of knowing and unrealized forms of sustaining connection.

"This Mouth Is Mine": John Keene

Where Spahr situates her meditation on the connections enabled by lyric address and gossip in the twenty-first-century context of our media-saturated lives, John Keene's short story "Blues," from his 2015 volume *Counternarratives*, presents a moving continuation of the tradition of lyric gossip by giving voice to an earlier moment from poetry's archive, rather than today's vast, uncharted, digital landscape. In listening to these gossipy whispers in

poetry's archive, Keene nonetheless responds to this century's disembodied terrain of digital information, emphasizing instead the queer transmission of cultural knowledge through bodily practices, including, to borrow a line from Frank O'Hara, "the poem whose words become your mouth."[13] "Blues" imagines a mid-1930s sexual encounter between Hughes and the Mexican poet Xavier Villaurrutia, who in 1931 had translated some of Hughes's poetry into Spanish and who in 1937 would dedicate his poem "North Carolina Blues" to Hughes. In speculating about Hughes and Villaurrutia, "Blues" explicitly takes part in the gossip about Hughes's opaque sexuality that has played—as I discussed in chapter 2—a progressively central role in understandings of his writing, turning to poetry, especially, to tease out the details of a possible liaison for which there is no concrete archival evidence. Keene approaches Hughes's and Villaurrutia's poetry as a vital source of gossip, or a queer counter-archive—the product of "lyric historians," to recall Hughes's own description of poets—that preserves the obscure voices and experiences of "people of the night," in part by refusing to subject those lives to the reductive demands of transparent intelligibility. As I argued earlier, Hughes's lyric gossip unsettles normative (and racialized) expectations of transparent voice and presence, instead enabling ephemeral spectacles of obscurity in which queer possibilities, both social and aesthetic, flourish. In so doing, his poetry establishes the very conditions that nurture Keene's "Blues" and its own act of queer preservation.

Although Keene, well known as a poet, designates "Blues" a story, or counternarrative, it belongs to a larger body of work exploring queer form. With its lyrical, elliptical structure, as much prose poem as fictional narrative, it might best be understood alongside the strange and exciting constellation of recent mixed-genre writing by poets ranging from Spahr to Maggie Nelson to Claudia Rankine to Brian Blanchfield to Keene himself—the list could go on—that has been variously marketed and described as lyric essays, creative nonfiction, poet's novels, or autotheory. This is writing that often looks and acts little like conventional notions of the lyric but, as part of its project of reimagining a poetics of self-expression, solicits or is received by an audience of lyric readers whose expectations it flirts with and baffles. A tradition of lyric gossip thus has much to tell us about such contemporary mixed-genre writing and the longer histories of its queer investments in both inhabiting and reconfiguring the normative social arrangements of the lyric genre.

In this instance, it tells us that the extravagant obscurities of style might themselves make queerness available to us. Like Hughes, Keene asks us to think about the queerness of form, beyond or even apart from explicit sexual content. He explains that "each of the stories in *Counternarratives* is doing something different, so each takes a distinct form, often directly informed by the subject matter."[14] We see form's queer connotations in the typography of "Blues," which instantly evokes Richard Bruce Nugent's 1926 story "Smoke, Lilies and Jade," known both for its structuring ellipses and for typically being considered the first literary depiction of male homosexuality by an African American writer. As in Nugent's story (which in fact features Hughes as a character at its margins), a scatter plot of ellipses links the third-person unfolding of Keene's characters' thoughts and establishes a throbbing pulse for their queer meditations. But if the principal subject matter of "Blues" is Hughes's opaque sexuality and the gossip surrounding it, Keene most locates that queerness in, and takes much of the work's language from, the "blueblack shadows" of night and the poems both Hughes and Villaurrutia themselves situated there.[15] Near the end of a night that has seen Langston and Xavier wander from Midtown Manhattan to Harlem and back, Langston reads and admires, in Xavier's hotel room, one of his poems: "That one is titled 'Nocturnal Estancias,'" Xavier explains. "I think my whole next book will be a volume of nocturnes" (270). Langston responds, "I myself have written so many poems about the night . . . That is where I truly live . . ." (270). Does Langston mean he "truly live[s]" in the night or in the poems he has written about it? Here experience and art, social and stylistic obscurity, blur—as in each poet's "poems about the night"—together, enabling the queer presences that live within and without these nocturnal stanzas and whose voices resonate throughout "Blues."

The many allusions and borrowings of "Blues" underscore the extent to which its queer gossip is steeped in literature and made possible in part by our recognition of literary style—by how the lush form of Nugent's story now immediately signifies queerness for readers in the know or how the nocturnal lyrics of Hughes and Villaurrutia have absorbed and circulate the affective investments of their queer readers. In fact, Keene's speculative encounter between Langston and Xavier begins and ends in their poetry. Before meeting Langston in person in Mexico City, Xavier has already "translated three [of his poems] and published them in a local journal" (261), and their subsequent meeting in New York, brought about by their association through poetry, concludes by looking forward, in the story's final lines, to the poems

that will in turn preserve this fleeting connection. Holding each other in the dark of "this dying room . . . its waning song," one asks:

> . . . will you write a poem . . . about tonight . . . I already have . . . and you . . . I have too . . . who will you give it to . . . you, my angel . . . and you . . . you, my very own . . . our secret . . . I loved my friend . . . amid this solitude . . . let us roam the night . . . together . . . loving . . . living . . . the blues . . . (271)

Keene draws much of the language of this conclusion—almost a brief cento—from actual poems by Hughes and Villaurrutia, and specifically poems often adduced as queer within their oeuvres. "I loved my friend" quotes Hughes's 1925 "Poem (For F. S.)," which begins, "I loved my friend. / He went away from me"—a lament appropriate for this scene's "dying room" and its "waning" amorous connection. The hotel room setting of Keene's scene itself recalls Hughes's 1927 poem "Desire," which experiences desire, in another phrase lifted earlier by "Blues," as "a double death," marked by the loss of "our mingled breath"—an evaporating moment "[i]n a naked / room" (271).[16] Further, Villaurrutia's enigmatic "North Carolina Blues," published in 1937 and dedicated to Hughes, critiques Jim Crow segregation in part through the erotics of "[n]ighttime hotels" and a similarly strange, ephemeral encounter of "[c]onfounded bodies and lips," such that "I wouldn't dare to say in the shadow: / This mouth is mine."[17] If Keene at first has Xavier utter precisely these words in "Blues"—as he and Langston "caress, and kiss," he says "this mouth is mine," soon insisting, too, "this mouth is his" (271)—in the aftermath of their fucking such certainty is indeed confounded, as it becomes difficult to say who is speaking the piece's final lines, whose mouth is whose, who is in possession of the piece's voice. These concluding lines' quotation of Hughes's 1926 "Harlem Night Song"—"Come, let us roam the night together / Singing"—accentuates this confounding of lips, mouths, and voices: rather than "mine" and "his," what has happened is now "our secret," "together," a joining of the story's two alternating narrative voices into one shared performance of the secret embedded in Hughes's and Villaurrutia's nocturnal lyrics.

This cento-like conclusion—like gossip, a voice at once individual and communal, constructed out of other people's words—is the response to approaching dawn, which promises to blot out the momentary refuge of night and the obscurity of its "blueblack shadows"; the lovers conceive a way to sustain "this dying room . . . its waning song," by preserving the song of the room in the rooms of poetry. Yet there is some temporal confusion,

here. When both poets claim to "already have" written "a poem . . . about tonight," they do not mean simply that they have internally composed their promised poems on the spot: the lines that follow quite literally quote from an archive of poems written mostly prior to the time of their fictive encounter. Poems, Keene suggests, have both written this night into existence and will preserve it. They are not static, fixed containers for individual experience but open spaces, affective archives into which one might enter and perform queerness, as Langston and Xavier and indeed Keene have done in "Blues," and as we do, too, if we recognize and recite the lines of Hughes's and Villaurrutia's poems, picking up on their lyric gossip, embodying it, roaming their night "together . . . loving . . . living . . . these blues . . ."

Person to Person: Eileen Myles

Three years after Hughes's then-unusual declaration that "poets are lyric historians" whose songs record the "emotional currents" of their communities, Allen Ginsberg celebrated another New York poet, Frank O'Hara, in similar terms, as a "[c]urator of funny emotions" and "deep gossip."[18] Of the many poets deemed heirs to O'Hara's curatorial gossip, Eileen Myles's relationship to O'Hara has always been both more oblique and more reciprocal: the idiosyncratic poetry Myles has built in part with tools made available by O'Hara's lyric gossip continues to reveal and reimagine the workings of his innovations. Of a mid-1970s workshop led by Alice Notley at the Poetry Project, Myles recalls, "Frank O'Hara always wrote poems about his artist friends and now he had been dead for ten years but Alice wasn't over it exactly. I had been in two poetry workshops with men before and the men said that personal poetry was done. For them I stopped writing it, and with Alice I could begin again. It was just different for women . . . the form itself wasn't finished."[19] The product of a later-generation New York School poet who approached the forms of "personal poetry" as continuation rather than conclusion, Myles's talky poems both extend O'Hara's project and—rooted in a working-class, radical dyke feminist sensibility—make more capacious the (straight) boys' club that the New York School increasingly became in the decades after O'Hara's death. For Myles, "social style" enacts poetic style and vice versa: "Poetry is gossip."[20] Or, as Dennis Cooper has lovingly put it, "Myles basically talks shit in skinny columns and calls them poems."[21]

Myles's most recent poems, which foreground the role of new communications technologies in poetry and gossip, suggest the personal forms O'Hara inhabited still aren't finished. If, for O'Hara, the intimately addressed

talk of the telephone could serve as both an alternative to and figure for the poem (recall his claim, "I was realizing that if I wanted to I could use the telephone instead of writing the poem, and so Personism was born"), for Myles, too, the phone has proven a useful technology for enacting and describing an experimental, talk-driven poetics.[22] In a 1999 talk entitled "How to Write an Avant-Garde Poem," Myles observes how "everything is recorded" in the twentieth century, and, "because we can just take pictures of something, artists decided they should be making pictures of something else. Expressing a different relationship to the world. I'm talking about seeing, but it's also true of hearing and if it's true of the camera, well it's true of the telephone, and the tape recorder too, seeing and hearing both."[23] Just as the visual arts, Myles contends, turned to abstraction in response to the photograph's new capacities for realism, experiments with talk in poetry can no longer carry on quite the same in the wake of mobile and smartphone technologies that have turned our phones into digital recorders and cameras and points of internet access, delivering new ways of recording and circulating gossip and poetry alike. What if Frank O'Hara had had a cell phone? Now that smartphones have made it convenient and common for individuals to literally record or transmit their voices in the midst of experience, the attentions of Myles's voluble, voice-based poetics have gravitated toward how talk mediated by technology, including the old, seemingly obsolete technology of the lyric, may reroute and even newly enable queer lines of connection.

Myles's 2012 volume *Snowflake*, for example, declares "my need to meet the new technology head on" and includes a series of poems, "dictated onto a small digital recorder," whose overt interests in the intersection of talk, digital technology, and poetry permeate the book as a whole.[24] In a statement of poetics accompanying a selection of poems from *Snowflake*, Myles writes, "My poems are comfortable with the idea that experience is a kind of knowing and that technology endlessly delivers new ways for us to describe how that knowing occurs. . . . I'd initially (like in the 70s) considered poetry a recording plain and simple. And now all these new forms of recording are amplifying and multiplying and frothing up the way I see."[25] As Myles expresses it in a short, untitled poem from *Snowflake*:

phone isn't
the same string
from person to

person now
that we carry
them and
have no homes (75)

If, having evolved well beyond the rudimentary immediacy of the tin-can telephone, the phone is no longer "the same string" connecting and making persons seem present to each other, then what of poems? The "we" of this little poem—similar to, or as extensions of, the ever-present prosthetic of mobile phones—find themselves without "homes," and poetry in an age of digital communication likewise may leave one feeling adrift, even dispossessed. But rather than a waning of poetry's ability to put persons in touch with other persons, Myles finds in such dispossession of interiority a potential "amplifying and multiplying and frothing up" of forms of connection and indeed personhood. Like the phone, poetry "isn't/the same string"—but, vitally, it remains a string.

One way that "phone isn't/the same string" is in enabling the private phone chat's ambulatory appearance in public, exterior spaces, outside of its traditional (and traditionally gendered) fixed settings in the interior, domestic space of the home or the world of the office. "There's a privacy in public that women do not have," Myles states in an interview, and one might think, here, of how talking on one's cell phone in public has furnished women a new way to assert that privacy.[26] Communications analysts have found that roughly 60 percent of women report deterring unwanted attention by displaying their phones when alone in public,[27] while one in four people have "*pretended* to talk on the mobile phone when there was actually no one on the other end of the line."[28] For most of the twentieth century, as we have seen, when one "pretends to be talking to himself or to someone else" who is not present, one might be mistaken for making a lyric poem.[29] Yet the idea of a lyric privacy in public has typically entailed social and affective limits that would exclude selves, feelings, and experiences marked as other. The now ubiquitous phenomenon of the overheard cell-phone conversation—equal parts irritating and engrossing, collapsing the line between private and public speech and confusing our sense of being addressed—thus oddly recalls both Mill's traditional idea of the lyric and O'Hara's poetic performance of self-talk (discussed in chapter 3) and its disruption of normative expectations of mutual intelligibility. Myles also perversely suggests poetry as a kind of self-talk that might anticipate today's

soundscape of one-sided cell-phone chatter, remembering how "often I rehearsed poems walking down the street. This is before cell phones, so it was just us, the performance artists and the crazy people talking to ourselves."[30] Here, Myles's poetic self-talk provides a way of carving out a "privacy in public": its disruption of social norms is not a retreat from public space so much as a public performance of privacy that circumvents its demands, making room for selves whose creative relationship to the social has often been seen as crazy or "finished."

"Call It In," from *Snowflake*, presents just this sort of poetic self-talk, with the poet, out in public "without pen/and paper," seeming literally to use the cellphone as an alternative compositional tool to talk out the poem to themself—to, as the title announces, call it in. The idiom "call it in" indicates not just a reporting of information—about an accident? a crime? some other upsetting of the ordinary?—to authorities, but also the displaced idiom "phone it in," or the passionless performance of a duty. Poised between emergency and routine, the poem reports an everyday self in crisis, a crisis, in part, *of* poetic making and uncertain connection: "I am a bad/place// without pen/and paper," it begins, before detailing a landscape of "falling flower[s]," "birds screaming," a "sprinkler's/grief," "contagion," and "contention" (42, 44). Myles's making strange of familiar idiom enacts a slippage between self and landscape—the poet, here, is not exactly *in* a bad place, as we might expect, but is *themself* the "bad place" the poem describes, a space of subjectivity figured as "a dark park" in which a "dark thought" is "a flower fall" and what the "birds" are "screaming again" is the poet's own refrain: "I am a bad/place" (43, 44, 42). At moments we even seem to hear—in an effect akin to O'Hara's taking on the inanimate, anonymous voice of public cruising spaces in poems like "Grand Central" and "Homosexuality"—the inanimate voice of the park itself describing the "close kind of/Love// of humans// hiding in the/shade" (45). In transforming the lyric "I" into the very "place" whose badness it effects and worries, the poem presents its talk *to* the self as also talk *about* the self; the poem's self-talk about what happens in the dark of its "bad place" is, as it often is for O'Hara, also a form of self-gossip, and the poem's crisis of connection a worry about how the private self might appear within the constraints of public space. The final refrain's return to something closer to the expected idiom—"my place is a bad/place/without/pencil and pen"—thus works less to delineate self from surroundings than to confirm the poem's self-talk and its gossipy blurring of the sub-

ject and object of talk, of intimate, private interiority and anonymous public space, and of present person and inanimate thing (46).

The crisis of connection that the poem calls in concludes ambiguously, if at all, as the final stanza declares, "my voice / is thin / and cutting / through" (46). These lines do not resolve the crisis but restate it: rather than a singular, autonomous voice, disembodied yet locatable in space—the sort of voice we might associate with landline telephones before the phone became a different sort of string or with the expectations of modern lyric reading—"Call It In" broadcasts only a diffuse signal. What sort of "voice" is this? Do these lines question the poem's ability to effect an intimate vocal presence, implying that such a presence is "thin" at best? Or, then again, do they register something more difficult to hear, more queer perhaps—a "thin" signal that, although slight, is "cutting / through" the noise on lyric's line? And what of the lineation and how it also suggests that this "voice" is that of gossip, "thin / and cutting" in its frank assessment of itself as a "bad place"? However we understand it, the "voice" these lines assert evinces the residue of talk made material and circulated: mediated by the phone and the poem, susceptible to cutting out and cut into lines. By acknowledging the illusions of textual "voice," Myles's poem makes a "bad place" for other forms of presence and personhood. "Call It In" doesn't disconnect the lyric "string / from person to / person" but, as in the lyric gossip of Stein, Hughes, O'Hara, and Merrill, seeks out connections that cut through conventional notions of self-possession and poetic speech, rethinking the subject as object and dispossession as self-possession as it claims the queer agency of self-gossip.

Spilling the Tea: D. A. Powell

The trouble on Myles's line evokes not only O'Hara's telephone talk but also the bad connections of a very different poet, James Merrill, and his troubled efforts to place long-distance calls to the dead via Ouija board. In Merrill's *The Changing Light at Sandover*, the character of Auden explains heaven as a "MACHINE WHICH MAKES THE DEAD AVAILABLE TO LIFE."[31] In this conception, heaven appears akin to the machine of lyric poetry, often understood as seeking to make the absent or inanimate present and available. It also resembles the machine of gossip in *Sandover*, depicted in all of its vivifying particularity as effecting a "celestial salon" that bridges this world and the next.[32] If there is something self-consciously silly, even embarrassing, about two men treating heavenly machinery as a parlor game involving poetry and gossip, the advent of HIV/AIDS in the years immediately follow-

ing the completion of *Sandover* made the Ouija trilogy's lyric gossip and its strategies for making available a community of the dead seem less an elaborate lark than a strangely necessary queer resource. By 1990, when Eve Kosfosky Sedgwick—as we have seen—redescribed the devalued work of gossip as a paradigmatic form of "nonce taxonomy," one enabling richly fluid "imaginings concerning all the kinds it may take to make up a world," it was newly clear that the "distinctive needs" of those communities confronting the "foregrounded pressure of loss in the AIDS years" were "peculiarly disserved by [gossip's] devaluation."[33] For Sedgwick, "as one anticipates or tries to deal with the absence of people one loves, it seems absurdly impoverishing to surrender to theoretical trivialization or to 'the sentimental' one's descriptive requirements that the piercing bouquet of a given friend's particularity be done some justice."[34] Contesting the "impoverishing" view of gossip's affective epistemology as not serious or rigorous enough to count as a valid way of knowing, Sedgwick asserts its value for those needing to keep close the lives and experiences of loved ones whom official histories are unaware of, or uninterested in, or even actively hostile to. Gossip, she suggests, can archive what is off the record, performing and preserving, in "piercing" detail, both the beloved dead and the loves and losses—the *feeling*—of the still living.

Sedgwick's account of gossip's archival function resonates with what the poet D. A. Powell identifies as the "age-old desire" of elegy: "to bring the beloved back from obscurity." Elegy does so, Powell writes, by creating a kind of utopian archive, "a paradise of remembering."[35] Nearly two decades after the appearance of *Sandover* and three years after Merrill's death from a heart attack related to AIDS, Powell's own queer trilogy—comprised of the books *Tea* (1998), *Lunch* (2000), and *Cocktails* (2004), and gathered in an omnibus publication entitled *Repast* (2014)—also turns to the methods and matters of gossip in its efforts to preserve queer community by dishing with and about the dead. Powell describes these poems that emerge from, but are not reducible to, the American AIDS crisis as "trying to archive that period," feeling "somehow, if I don't put all this stuff in it'll be lost."[36] *Tea* announces the trilogy and its counter-archival work as that of a queer gossip: in a prefatory note providing "The Tea on Tea," Powell details his titular term's history in "the queer argot," where it signifies both gossip and public sex. For pre-Stonewall queens, "'tea' was a session of gossip exchange. If one was invited to 'tea,' this usually meant that one was going to be privy to some scandalous information"—a play on the sort of gossip that would

make an overhearing server *spill the tea*. By extension, a public toilet where "men gathered for sex (and gossip too) was hence a 'tea room' "—a cruising site lush with scandal.[37] Steeped in gossip and sex, Powell's "three-course *Divine Comedy*" begins, in *Tea*, with a sequence of gossipy elegies for friends and lovers lost to AIDS and ends, in *Cocktails*, with a concluding "song of paradise" that represents the culmination of the trilogy's elegiac desire to, if not bring its beloveds back from obscurity, then to make that obscurity, as in *Sandover*, "AVAILABLE TO LIFE." In this song, Powell figures his "paradise of remembering" as a "queer niteclub"—not unlike *Sandover*'s "celestial salon" or "Plato's Club"—where a community of "phantoms" and "voyeurs, passion flowers, trolls, twinks, dancers, cruisers, lovers without lovers," are all invited, like the reader, to enter "the door marked HEAVEN: someone on the dancefloor, waiting just for you" (205).

Of course, queer archiving is as much an act of creation as preservation, a reparative piecing together of the treasured pieces of ephemeral or unfriendly worlds that seeks sustenance and pleasure in their new arrangement. Like Merrill, Powell constructs out of poetry and gossip the "HEAVEN" of friends, lovers, and influences that promises to receive him. Powell's poems exhibit a magpie nature: their unusually long, lurching lines with multiple caesurae hoard and somehow hold together often disparate fragments. This collecting of bits of language from other poets, from song lyrics, from gay slang, from conversation, from "all of the kinds of speech that I have heard around me—tall speech and short speech, the proper and the vernacular," situates the poems both within a wide-ranging contemporary interest in appropriated speech *and* a longer tradition of lyric gossip and its tendency to tell one's own story through the materials of someone else's (4). Steph Burt writes that Powell "likens his project to that of a DJ, who collects, sorts, mixes, and makes available for a community already existing songs."[38] I would add that this collecting and remixing of communal texts is also the long-standing project of the gossip, and, especially, of the poet as gossip. *Tea*, for example, ends with a "[first fugue]" in which each line consists of a quotation from a deceased gay male poet, a lyric from a song by gay disco icon Sylvester, and a phrase from one of the volume's preceding poems. A "[second fugue]" picks up where the first leaves off, opening the trilogy's next volume, *Lunch* (which cribs its title from Frank O'Hara's most famous book), with a mash-up of lines from Gertrude Stein and language from the poems to follow. The language collected by these fugues, which conjure the figure of the House of Fame, formally enacts the tactics of the

trilogy more generally: in voicing the words of, among others, Shakespeare, Essex Hemphill, Walt Whitman, Paul Mariah, O'Hara, Robert Duncan, Merrill, James Schuyler, and Stein alongside his own, Powell both channels and builds, like Merrill in *Sandover*, a queer literary tradition for his work.

The just preservation of queer community and such poetic self-making indicate what is won by Powell's lyric gossip. But there are also costs. A poem in *Tea* spoken by the DJ and prolific dance music composer Patrick Cowley, most known for his collaborations with Sylvester, includes a line that could apply to Powell himself (or, for that matter, Merrill) and his part in the trilogy's network of queer friends, lovers, and writers: "they chose me for a host: I was already carrying this choir in my head. the language we share" (24). The multiple connotations of the word "host," here—Cowley was DJ and host for the renowned "Menergy" parties at the gay San Francisco club the EndUp in 1981, host for the shared language of his disco anthems, and, ominously, host for the AIDS virus to which he would succumb in 1982, at age thirty-two—again suggest the close relation among gossip, poetry, and sex in Powell's work but, beyond its pleasures, intimate the newly fraught historical significance of that relation. Like Merrill, Powell struggles with the stakes of becoming, or being chosen as, "a host" or medium for communal song that can both affirm *and* efface its performer. "To survive is an astonishing gift," he avows in the preface to *Tea.* "The price of that gift is memory" (4). Such sentiments offer a different perspective on the poet's archival task of creating a "paradise of remembering" and its demands, portending all one must carry in being called to, as Powell's preface states, "writ[e] this book for the men who did not live to write their own stories" (5). However otherwise celebrated, the poet as gossip—potentially reduced, as Merrill worried, to a mere medium for others' stories—here assumes an unenviable task.

We can see more distinctly how Powell takes up the pleasures and demands of this task in one of *Tea*'s several quirky poems remembering a lost beloved:

> your shiny buckle unfastens at last. we who were always tarnished and
> dingged up had marveled
> certain tim was only gotten with soft hands no teeth and the patience that
> never tears xmas wrap
>
> what a handsome package you made: an after meal brusher. an "always
> says please and thank you"

always I knew your polish would fade. good child gone bad: a talkshow
loomed with you on it

I didn't have to be right. look I am loving you as you aren't: be even that
bright square again (30)

The first quirk that captures my attention in these five long lines is the unexplained shift from the opening line's individual, second-person address to Tim ("your shiny buckle unfastens") to the second line's collective speculation about how he might be seduced ("we who were . . . certain tim was only gotten with soft hands"). This shift confuses the poem's address with its gossip, or talking *to* with talking *about*. The elision reminds us that lyric address can effect only the illusion of Tim's presence, such that its impossible speaking to—which nonetheless resumes in the subsequent lines—is in some sense always a kind of speaking of. At the same time, this elision also betrays an uncertainty as to whether the intimate calling of lyric address or the gossipy summoning of "a given friend's particularity" might best make that presence feel available. Unable to choose between the lyric and gossip, Powell invests his poem's lyric address to the beloved with the sensibility of gossip, asking us to weigh the powers of both.

This confusion between lyric and gossip is only compounded by the confusion between the intimacies of sex and gossip that the poem recalls and enacts. The complicated figure of the "shiny buckle" presents both a synecdoche for Tim and his reputation (gossip) and a metonym for the appealing "package" the belt buckle's undoing would reveal (sex). Through this figure the poem remembers Tim as "shiny," "handsome," clean, polite—a man with "polish"—and also evokes those with less conventional manners and less pristine sexual reputations than Tim's—or "we who were always tarnished and dingged up"—and their playful, teasing desire to unfasten, as if an initiation into a world less secure or reputable but more vibrant, his carefully wrapped, "handsome package." The poem's "I" may or may not have been gratified in his direct efforts at doing, or rather undoing, Tim—but the gossip about Tim, eventually proven "right," seems in a weird way to have succeeded. Gossip's performative language, repeated often enough, can establish its own truth, and just so the knowing, gossipy speculation that Tim's "polish would fade" as he became a "good child gone bad," or the occasion of sexual gossip ("a talkshow loomed with you on it"), itself seems to have "tarnished" Tim's reputation and behavior. The desire to unfasten Tim's buckle

and the desire to unfasten Tim's reputation—the erotics of initiation or conquest and the erotics of gossip—here become hard to distinguish.

The poem's final line significantly doesn't settle these confusions among the lyric, gossip, and sex, but revels in them. If the poem begins by affirming Tim's death as a sexual release from the burdens of life and reputation ("your shiny buckle unfastens at last"), it ends by asserting the desire to buckle up all that has come undone ("be even that bright square again"), as if Tim might somehow be reanimated by once more securing what gossip and sex have unfastened. When the poem's "I" concedes that, by voicing his longing for Tim's lost "polish," "I am loving you as you aren't," we might be tempted to read this admission as a lament for the innocence of the sexually corrupted. But the mischievous tone of the poem's goofy metaphors and double entendres and the circularity of its structure, which delights in the frisky motions of doing and undoing, opening and closing, suggests to me more the desire to preserve both the "piercing bouquet" of the lost and the feeling of surviving them. The poem wants, that is, to again initiate Tim into a queer world—"here is the door marked HEAVEN"—that he has already entered, indeed to make continually available the tremendous and terrible gift of that joyful initiation, facilitated by gossip and sex and brought near to us by poetry. To "be right" about Tim is both to lose him and, "at last," to receive him. In Powell's lyric gossip and its "paradise of remembering," there's no crying over spilled tea.

Passing the Word

One of the most basic affirmations of this book has been that gossip, although typically silenced or muted in discussions of the poetry for which it is sometimes imagined as an other, in fact pervades modern and contemporary poetry, and that once one tunes in to the important ways that gossip has tested and rearranged lyric theories, it is hard not to hear it. Spahr, Keene, Myles, and Powell are just some of the poets we might turn to today to hear it. Each of these poets presents—like the tradition of lyric gossip this book has detailed—not a rejection of but a reparative engagement with the lyric, one that draws energy from the contradictions, pleasures, and ambivalences of persistent lyric attachments and that turns to gossip, or gossip-related speech practices, to radically reconsider what those attachments entail: what poetry is, what it does, how it situates us, and the queer things it might yet do. In concluding here, my point is not to position these four

poets, or even the four poets at the center of my study, as the end point or primary thread for a tradition of lyric gossip. Instead, through their examples I hope to suggest the continued relevance of the construct of gossip—which broaches questions about privacy, autonomy, selfhood, and community and leans toward answers seemingly at odds with the modern lyric's structuring ideals—for thinking about a constellation of twenty-first-century poetries and to give over this news to others, in the hopes that, like the best gossip, they will pass it on and transform it in ways that this study has not anticipated.

Notes

Introduction

1. See Emler, "Gossip, Reputation, Adaptation," 131; and Dunbar, Marriott, and Duncan, "Human Conversational Behavior." Their finding that "about two thirds of our conversation time" is devoted to gossip has been, as Fox writes, "consistently repeated across a wide range of settings, ages, and social backgrounds" ("Evolution").

2. Warren and Brandeis, "Right to Privacy," 193. Warren and Brandeis here quote the biblical New Testament, Luke 12:3.

3. As Jahan Ramazani argues, "Poems come into being partly by echoing, playing on, reshaping, refining, heightening, deforming, inverting, combating, hybridizing, and compressing extrapoetic forms of language" (*Poetry and Its Others*, 6). My study of poetry and gossip accords with Ramazani's guiding claim that "close analysis of poetry's embrace of, and resistances to, its intergenres helps illuminate poetry's various self-understandings" (16).

4. Frost made this claim a number of times; here I quote from a 1956 lecture in which he celebrates "gossip," which "may be defined as our guessing at each other," and avows that "gossip exalts in poetry. Poetry is the top of our guessing at each other. . . . The beauty of gossip is that it is the whole of our daily life. It has flashes of insight. The height of imagination is there" (quoted in Burnshaw, *Robert Frost Himself*, 253). I will return to Frost's poetics of gossip shortly, and in more detail in chapter 4.

5. Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry" (1833), 349.

6. Spacks's *Gossip*, for instance, the definitive work on gossip's relationship to literary language, tellingly omits poetry from its survey of gossip and the novel, drama, published letters, and biography, and subsequent studies of gossip have followed suit in emphasizing the novel, or drama, as the genres most amenable to gossip. The 1833 version of Mill's influential essay itself explicitly encourages such an oppositional (and gendered) understanding of poetry and gossip, aligning the feminized social practice of gossip with narrative and the novel, and against poetic interiority:

"The same persons whose time is divided between sightseeing, gossip, and fashionable dissipation," he asserts, "take a natural delight in fictitious narrative; the excitement it affords is of the kind which comes from without. Such persons are rarely lovers of poetry, though they may fancy themselves so, because they relish novels in verse" ("Thoughts on Poetry" 345).

The vast majority of extant scholarship on gossip and literature theorizes gossip in relation to the novel. For sustained accounts of gossip and the novel, see, in addition to Spacks, Schantz, *Gossip, Letters, Phones*; and Martin, *Literature and Gossip*, a special issue of *Forum for Modern Language Studies*.

For studies of gossip and drama see Salvato, *Gossip*, a special issue of *Modern Drama*.

The few book-length scholarly treatments of gossip and poetry all analyze work that predates the eighteenth-century rise of the novel and thus are relatively uninterested in the particular relation between gossip and poetry as a genre per se. See Phillips, *Transforming Talk*; Lochrie, *Covert Operations*; and Kerr and Walker, *Fama and Her Sisters*.

Two art historical studies that broach gossip and literature have been useful for my discussion, as well. Wolf's *Andy Warhol, Poetry, and Gossip in the 1960s* analyzes Warhol's relationships with poets and how that specific social context informs his work; despite the genre's prominent billing in her title, however, Wolf's study is primarily of Warhol's art rather than gossip and postwar poetry. See also Butt's *Between You and Me*.

7. As Deborah Nelson writes, lyric poetry has served as a "site of intense preoccupation with privacy since it has been classified, most insistently in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as the most private form of expression, a genre of intimacy that must, of course, pass through public expression" (*Pursuing Privacy*, 28).

8. As quoted in Van Buren, "Pain Gossip Causes."

9. Van Buren, "Gossip."

10. Van Buren encouraged her readers to save and share the poem: "Personally, I think it's worth framing," she wrote (ibid.).

11. "You had a poem in your column titled 'Gossip,'" writes a reader of Dear Abby, "Would you please run it again?" "Dear Ann Landers," asks one of her readers, "In recent years you printed a poem on the dangers of gossip and the damage it can do. Could you run it again, please?" See Van Buren, "Pain Gossip Causes"; and Landers, "Idle Gossip."

12. Wordsworth, "Personal Talk" (1807), 269.

13. Eliot, *Waste Land* (1923), 138–139. In her notes on the poem, Valerie Eliot indicates the passage's origins in actual gossip from which Eliot, despite his obvious interests in it, distances himself by locating it in a gendered and classed body, playing on the familiar trope of gossip as servants' talk: "Eliot said this passage was 'pure Ellen Kellond,' a maid employed by the Eliots, who recounted it to them" (127).

14. Masters, *Spoon River Anthology*, 34.

15. Frost to William Stanley Braithwaite, March 22, 1915, in *Selected Letters*, 159.

16. Frost, *Poetry*, 62–68, 82.

17. Lowell, *Collected Poems*, 191–192.

18. Pound, *Personae*, 57–58. Hereafter cited in the text.

19. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 163.

20. See, for example, Spacks, *Gossip*, 24–46; Collins, "Gossip," 106–116; and Parsons, *Reading Gossip*, 4–5.

21. See Dickey, *Modern Portrait Poem*, 67–68.

22. Spacks, *Gossip*, 121.

23. See, for instance, ibid., 4; and Hannerz, "Gossip Networks," 36.

24. See Foster, "Research on Gossip," 82–83.

25. See Abrahams, "Performance-Centered Approach"; Hannerz, "Gossip Networks"; Rosnow, "Rumor and Gossip"; Spacks, *Gossip*; and Yerkovich, "Gossip."

26. Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 466. Ginsberg's apostrophe to the deceased O'Hara in "City Midnight Junk Strains" fittingly suggests how gossip's speaking *of* can also be a strangely tender form of speaking *to*—a quality of O'Hara's poetic gossip I discuss in chapter 3.

27. Gunn, *Boss Cupid*, 51–52.

28. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* defines "paralipsis" (Latin *occultatio* or *occupatio*) as "when we say that we are passing by, or do not know, or refuse to say that which precisely now we are saying" (321); George Puttenham, in his *Arte of English Poesie*, terms paralipsis "the Passager," and defines it "as if we set but light of the matter, and . . . therefore we do but passe it over slightly when in deede we do then intend most effectually and despightfully if it be invective to remember it: it is also when we seeme not to know a thing, and yet we know it well enough." Puttenham's emphasis on "invective" and on what "we seeme not to know . . . yet we know it well enough," as well as his illustration—four lines of verse in which "I hold my peace, and will not say, for shame/The much untruth of that uncivil dame"—strongly link paralipsis to gossip (232).

29. Duhamel, *Star-Spangled Banner*, 48–49.

30. Ibid.

31. One literary journal went so far as to pose this as a recurring question in an interview series: "There has been much speculation about whom the poet might be in Denise Duhamel's poem 'Sex with a Famous Poet.' Whom would you say it might be?" ("Interview with a Poet").

32. Spacks, *Gossip*, 170.

33. Dlugos, *Fast Life*, 351.

34. Koestenbaum, "Stein Is Nice," 313.

35. Stein, *Stanzas in Meditation: The Corrected Edition*, 65.

36. Mullen, *Sleeping with the Dictionary*, 23.

37. Stein, *Stanzas in Meditation*, passim; Hughes, *Montage*, 70.

38. See, for example, Dunbar, "Gossip."

39. Virginia Jackson describes and theorizes the history of "lyric reading" in *Dickinson's Misery*; in her entry for "Lyric" in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*; and, with Yopie Prins, in *The Lyric Theory Reader*. For a range of varying, recent responses to the lyric genre, including those of Jackson and Prins, see the cluster of essays that appeared in *PMLA* under the heading "The New Lyric Studies" and Hillebrandt, Klimek, Müller, Waters, and Zymner, *Theories of Lyric*, a special issue of *Journal of Literary Theory.* For more on historical poetics, see Prins, "'What Is Historical Poetics?'"; for an assessment of the "new lyric studies," see Burt, "What Is This Thing Called Lyric?"

40. Virginia Jackson, "Lyric," 833.

41. Ibid.

42. Virginia Jackson, "Response." Poetry's part in this "project of invention" tends to get somewhat occluded in Jackson's and Prins's various accounts of it; my effort is to remain alert to poems themselves as a crucial source of thinking about the lyric.

43. Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 86. Ramazani similarly contends that "lyric is a changing set of conventions or schemas sometimes unconsciously brought to works by writers and audiences—works that summon, resist, remix, defy, and remake those encoded presuppositions, or . . . horizons of lyric expectation" ("Lyric Poetry," 99).

44. Jackson and Prins argue that "avant-garde anti-lyricism . . . continues to need the lyric as the definition of the kind of poetry it is not" (*Lyric Theory Reader*, 452).

45. Gillian White, *Lyric Shame*, 6.

46. Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," 149.

47. Ibid. José Esteban Muñoz's concept of disidentification is relevant here for thinking about how those excluded from the universal lyric subject negotiate the insistence of lyric reading, how their poems do not neatly align themselves with or against the exclusionary lyric object but instead transform it for their own purposes. As Muñoz writes, "The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture" (*Disidentifications*, 31).

48. In approaching Stein's, Hughes's, O'Hara's, and Merrill's formal innovations on the lyric genre as a crucial engagement with rather than a turn away from the social, my project aligns with the recent call for queer studies to return anew to questions

of form. Scholarship that takes up this call responds to how the work of minoritarian artists has often been reduced to its sociopolitical content, or "tasked with producing art that transmits information rather than pushing aesthetic boundaries"—even while "aesthetic innovation and formal manipulation are . . . the very *substance* of many of these artists' engagement with legacies of social violence" (Amin, Musser, and Pérez, "Queer Form," 226).

49. Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry," 349.

50. Ibid. Notable exceptions include Deborah Nelson's *Pursuing Privacy* and Susan Rosenbaum's *Professing Sincerity*. Rosenbaum argues that since the late eighteenth century, "by performing their 'private' lives and feelings in public, poets marketed the self, cultivated celebrity, and advanced professional careers," such that "the lyric poem is not simply an idealizing refuge from or debased acquiescence to the problems of modern society, but is a stage on which the moral expectations of literary authorship have been variously performed, interrogated, and remade in concert with a commercializing literary world" (5, 8).

51. Spacks, *Gossip*, 6.

52. Abelove, *Deep Gossip*, xii. In describing this queer form of gossip, Abelove turns to lines from Ginsberg's previously mentioned elegy for O'Hara—lines that portray O'Hara as a "[c]urator of funny emotions," with a "common ear / for our deep gossip" (Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 467).

53. Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 52, 53. See Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*.

54. Deborah Nelson contends that, as "lyric subjectivity presupposed a privacy and autonomy that were gendered," pressing "questions about privacy" in the lyric project came to "turn insistently back into questions about gender and sexuality" (*Pursuing Privacy*, xvii).

55. Stein, *Stanzas in Meditation: The Corrected Edition*, 57.

56. Ashbery, *Collected Poems*, 9.

57. Shoptaw, *On the Outside*, 21.

58. Ashbery wrote "The Grapevine" in 1953, making it unlikely that his poem explicitly alludes to Stein's still unpublished poem, but after the two poems each appeared in book form in the same year, 1956, Ashbery favorably reviewed the Yale edition of *Stanzas* (see "Impossible," 12–13). For Ashbery, already familiar with Stein's work and its gossip, her style in *Stanzas*—strikingly resonant with his own in poems like "The Grapevine"—must have seemed especially to speak to his own poetry and the queer, gossipy contours of his cultural moment. For more on Ashbery's relation to Stein—and particularly to *Stanzas*—see Setina, "From 'Impossible' Writing."

59. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 23.

60. Spacks, *Gossip*, 3.

61. Koestenbaum, *Queen's Throat*, 84–85. Employing the same metaphor, Doug-

las Crimp contends that "the most fundamental need gossip has served for queers is that of the construction—and reconstruction—of our identities" ("Right On, Girlfriend!," 313).

62. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 23.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

65. Barthes, *Neutral*, 11.

66. Ibid., 6, 8 (emphasis mine).

67. Ibid., 36.

68. Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, 169.

69. Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, 185.

70. Goodman, introduction to *Good Gossip*, 7.

71. Hughes, *Montage*, 27, 77.

72. Ibid., 47.

73. See O'Hara's "Spleen," *Collected Poems*, 187.

74. Merrill, *Changing Light*, 55.

Chapter One. "They Will Tell Well"

1. Van Vechten, "How to Read" (1914), 155–156; and "Medals for Miss Stein" (1923), 123.

2. Van Vechten, "Gertrude Stein" (1946), 291.

3. *Testimony against Gertrude Stein*, 6 (Henri Matisse).

4. *Testimony against Gertrude Stein*, 2, 12 (Eugene Jolas and Tristan Tzara, respectively).

5. Reid, *Art by Subtraction*, 186. Reid describes his book as "an essay in decapitation" (vii).

6. Ibid., 186.

7. Bromfield, "Gertrude Stein" (1933), 65.

8. Troy, "Note" (1933), 67.

9. Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*, 218; Perloff, "(Im)Personating Gertrude Stein," 61–62.

10. Stein, *Stanzas in Meditation: The Corrected Edition*, 152. Hereafter cited in the text. *Stanzas* was first published in 1956 in *Stanzas in Meditation and Other Poems*, part of Yale's editions of Stein; this recent "corrected edition" of *Stanzas*, edited by Susannah Hollister and Emily Setina, presents as its unmarked reading copy the previously unpublished manuscript version of the poem and includes in an indispensable appendix all of the subsequent variations that appear in the poem's two typescripts and significant published versions.

I quote from this valuable edition with the slight caveat that, in privileging the manuscript version of Stein's poem as its reading copy, the edition also privileges

Ulla E. Dydo's widely accepted argument that "the text of 'Stanzas' in the posthumous Yale volume is corrupt" (*Language That Rises*, 510). Dydo's argument derives from her fascinating archival discovery that the second typescript of *Stanzas* consistently replaces the word "may" with "can" (though not entirely). Linking the anomaly of this specific, thoroughgoing revision to Stein's having found, while going through old papers in the spring of 1932, the manuscript of *Q.E.D.*, her early novel based on her affair with May Bookstaver, Dydo argues that Alice B. Toklas, who felt this past affair had been hidden from her, became "enraged" and

> destroyed—or made Gertrude destroy—May's letters, which had served as the basis for the early novel. She became, as she put it, "paranoid about the name May." That paranoia appears to be the key to the revisions of the text of *Stanzas*. Alice Toklas must have initiated the elimination of the words *may* and *May* from the stanzas in the hope of purging the poems of Gertrude Stein of anything suggestive of May Bookstaver. ("*Stanzas in Meditation*," 12–13).

The revisions, Dydo claims, are therefore "a biographical, not a literary, matter": "the corruptions of 'Stanzas' were not a part of the writing process but date to . . . when the poems were being retyped"; but because "the most authoritative text of a work is usually thought to be the latest, most up-to-date revised version," the first Yale edition of *Stanzas* relied on this "adulterated" text (*Language That Rises*, 501, 510, 490, 491).

While for ease of reference I cite the unmarked reading version of the poem, based on the manuscript, that appears in the corrected edition, I want to emphasize that it is the putatively corrupted Yale edition whose effects my study implicitly traces in linking Stein's poetics of gossip to the midcentury flourishing of lyric gossip that I examine in later chapters. As Wayne Koestenbaum notes, because poets like John Ashbery read the 1956 edition of *Stanzas*, it "has a certain literary-historical importance, whatever its textual inconsistencies" ("Stein Is Nice," 310). Even setting "literary-historical importance" aside, though, I contest Dydo's claim that the poem's may/can revisions are textual "corruptions." To read the revisions in this way is to erase the significance of Toklas's collaborative contributions to Stein's writing, and particularly the erotics of that lifelong collaboration (in which context the textual back and forth between "may" and "can," possibility and permission, seems of particular import). Further, there is no evidence that Toklas either made or somehow (but how?) forced Stein to make unauthorized changes to the poem, and Dydo herself notes that the "corrupt" text "includes a number of true revisions" (*Language That Rises*, 498). In fact, the six stanzas published by Stein in the February 1940 issue of *Poetry* are drawn from the supposedly "adulterated typescript" and include instances of the may/can revisions. Why is the text Stein authorized for publication during her lifetime *not* the authoritative text? Dydo's reading of the may/can edits as "corruptions," as "biographical" and "not literary," draws on precisely the neat opposition

between gossip and the literary that her intense interest in the Bookstaver affair—what she calls "this intricate biographical melodrama that leaves 'blood on the dining room floor' at the end of 1932"—so dramatically undercuts (*Language That Rises*, 499).

11. Sutherland, "Preface," xxiii.

12. Dydo, "*Stanzas in Meditation*," 4, 5.

13. Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*, 213. Though writing shortly before Bridgman's study, the poet and gossip Frank O'Hara seems to parody this common take on Stein's career, more broadly, in the one-line entry for "GERTRUDE STEIN" in his poem "Biographia Letteraria": "She hated herself because she wrote prose" (*Collected Poems*, 464).

14. Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*, 215, 217.

15. Ibid., 217.

16. This view evinces what Susan Rosenbaum identifies as "the widespread understanding of the lyric poem as a site of private, individual expression, an aesthetic and moral refuge from the taint of commercial culture" (*Professing Sincerity*, 4).

17. In his July 1957 review of the Yale edition of *Stanzas*, John Ashbery astutely designates the difficulties of generically pinning down "books like the *Autobiography* and books like *Stanzas*," describing *Stanzas* as "this poem that is always threatening to become a novel" ("Impossible," 12–13). For more on Ashbery's shrewd take on *Stanzas*, see Setina, "From 'Impossible' Writing."

18. From, in order, "Lockeridge" (1914), "Gentle Julia" (1914), and "What Is This" (1918), in Stein, *Bee Time Vine*, 178, 197; and "If I Told Him: A Completed Portrait of Picasso" (1923), 506.

19. Chessman, *Public Is Invited*, 3. See also Watson, *Gertrude Stein*, for a treatment of Stein and conversation. In Chessman's examination of dialogue in Stein, she briefly indicates Spacks's study of gossip and literary language as an influence on her thinking about dialogue, emphasizing—as Spacks herself does—that study's account of the "intimacy" of the "relationship" between a gossiping dyad (*Public Is Invited*, vii, 205). Though productive, such an emphasis tends to idealize gossip as a form of engagement, blurring important distinctions between it and dialogue, primarily by effacing the absent other who is objectified by gossip and whose exclusion enables its intimacies.

20. Stein, *Q.E.D.* (1903), 6. Adele's bon mot anticipates and brings to mind another, better-known feminist and modernist take on conversation, Rebecca West's pronouncement that "There is no such thing as conversation. It is an illusion. There are intersecting monologues, that is all" ("There Is No Conversation," 85).

21. See, for instance, DeKoven, *A Different Language*; Bowers, *"They Watch Me as They Watch This"*; Pondrom, "Introduction"; and Gygax, *Gender and Genre*.

22. Stein, *Ladies' Voices* (1922), 306. Hereafter cited in the text.

23. See book 12 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, 275–276. Ovid's brief description of Fame weaves its way through English poetic tradition, most notably providing the

model for Geoffrey Chaucer's more extensive version, in his c. 1380 *House of Fame*, and through Chaucer, inspiring Alexander Pope's 1715 adaptation, *Temple of Fame.*

24. Ibid., 275.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*, 149.

28. See, to begin, Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman." Norman Weinstein's description of Stein's literary "selections from high society or ladies' tea parties" as "fascinating . . . exhibitions of the vapidity and mental sloth of such circles" provides one particularly vivid example of the anxious effort to defend Stein's "fascinating" art from the supposedly idle female talk it voices (*Gertrude Stein*, 73).

29. The queerness of such agency becomes clearer when we think of it alongside Kathryn R. Kent's useful suggestion that Stein—specifically in *Tender Buttons*—responds to early twentieth-century American "dystopic fantasies of machine production" and their "nightmarish visions of female reproductivity gone out of control" by "claim[ing] the machine-as-body for her queer project," celebrating it "as a metaphor for lesbian subjectivity" (*Making Girls into Women*, 131, 151). We might also view Stein's gossip as anticipating what N. Katherine Hayles describes as a postwar moment in the development of audiotape where it came to function "as a mode of relation that produced a certain kind of postmodern subjectivity," one that "emerges from the instability produced when voices are taken out of bodies and bodies find themselves out of voices" ("Voices Out of Bodies," 75).

30. Warhol, *a, a novel*, 60.

31. Warhol, *THE Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, 26.

32. Ibid., 26–27.

33. Stein, *Q.E.D.*, 8.

34. Ibid.

35. Stein, *Autobiography*, 67, 15. Hereafter cited in the text.

36. Stein, "What Are Master-Pieces" (1935), 355.

37. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 23 (emphasis in original).

38. Stein, "Gradual Making" (1935), 274.

39. Ibid., 272.

40. Ibid., 270.

41. One should note that, as might be expected, Stein does not consistently employ her distinction between the terms "hearing" and "listening," often using them interchangeably (as she uses the term "hear," here, to describe what elsewhere she might refer to as *hearing* primarily "language" and *listening* primarily to "tones . . . and rhythms"). Despite this inconsistency, I hope the select examples I present show how throughout her work Stein attempts to theorize a hearing/listening distinction.

42. Barthes, *Neutral*, 36.

43. Ibid., 18.

44. Ibid. (emphasis in original).

45. Ibid.

46. Stein, *Geographical History* (1935), 460.

47. Barthes, *Neutral*, 36.

48. Ibid., 19.

49. The term "Caesar," along with "cow" and others, has been identified in Stein's writing as part of a coded lesbian erotics. The erotic significance of these terms hardly seems coded, though, in lush passages like the following, from "Lifting Belly" (c. 1915–1917):

> I say lifting belly and then I say lifting belly and Caesars. I say lifting belly gently and Caesars gently. I say lifting belly again and Caesars again. I say lifting belly and I say Caesars and I say lifting belly Caesars and cow come out. I say lifting belly and Caesars and cow come out. . . . Lifting belly say can you see the Caesars. I can see what I kiss. (435)

Susan Holbrook usefully critiques the critical effort to "decode" Stein's work in "Lifting Bellies, Filling Petunias."

50. An alternate reading of this passage might view its "we" as concealing its illicit "seeing" of "Caesar" from Genevieve—gossiping, that is, about Genevieve's being out of the loop of their own gossip-worthy behavior and its erotics. As I will discuss, this potential for the gossiping "we" to themselves become the stuff of gossip's speculation, and thus objects of talk rather than subjects, is key to Stein's interest in gossip.

51. Gygax, *Gender and Genre*, 48.

52. Stein, "Poetry and Grammar" (1934), 319.

53. Ibid., 317–318.

54. See Dydo's headnote for *Ladies' Voices* in *A Stein Reader*, 306.

55. Puchner, *Stage Fright*, 110, 109.

56. In *The Autobiography*, Stein presents what might be a defining moment for this technique: "Once when she was about eight," says Alice of Stein, "she tried to write a Shakespearean drama in which she got as far as a stage direction, the courtiers making witty remarks. And then as she could not think of any witty remarks gave it up" (75). Here, in Stein's first dramatic effort, the stage direction itself becomes the witty remark it announces, comically blurring diegesis and dialogue.

57. Dydo, Moad, and Rice, "Note," 11, 14.

58. Stein, *Geography and Plays*, 203.

59. Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 236.

60. Ibid., 234–235.

61. Ibid., 236.

62. Puchner, *Stage Fright*, 112.

63. Stein, "Plays" (1934), 258.

64. Frank, "Resonating Bodies," 511.

65. Ibid.

66. Stein, "Plays," 258.

67. Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, 6.

68. Ibid., 7. In his 1957 radio broadcast "On Lyric Poetry and Society," Theodor Adorno articulates this dream as a particularly lyric one. Of the poet Stefan George he says:

> [He] hears his own language as though it were a foreign tongue. He overcomes its alienation . . . by intensifying it until it becomes the alienation of a language no longer actually spoken, even an imaginary language, and in that imaginary language he perceives what would be possible, but never took place, in its composition. (52–53)

69. Hejinian, *Language of Inquiry*, 360; Dydo, *Language That Rises*, 506.

70. Virginia Jackson, "Lyric," 833; Cowley, "Last," 299.

71. Stein to Carl Van Vechten, March 18, 1937, in Stein and Van Vechten, *Letters*, 537.

72. Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry," 349; Eliot, *Three Voices*, 27; Abrams, "Structure and Style," 77.

73. Sutherland, "Preface," xiii.

74. Loeffelholz, "History as Conjugation," 29.

75. Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry," 348; and Schmitz, "Difference," 124, 128.

76. Schmitz, "Difference," 130.

77. Bernadette Mayer provides one playful answer to this set of questions in her own "Stanzas in Meditation," a poem that smartly passes on Stein's original as if an influential bit of self-reproducing, lyric gossip, slightly garbled with each transmission: "i caught a bird which made a ball/& thought daughter of it," she begins, continuing, "but that's all they said:/get on over quick to the avian way" (*Scarlet Tanager*, 25).

78. Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers, MSS 76, Box 18, Folder 372.

79. Ibid. The poems within this notebook were posthumously published in *Stanzas in Meditation and Other Poems*, where both "A Bird" and "A Ball" appear, along with several other short, individually titled poems, as part of a sequence entitled "For-Get-Me-Not. *To Janet*." But in the manuscript from which I quote, it is not clear that these poems, though often in dialogue with each other, are meant to be subsumed as part of a sequence.

80. Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers, MSS 76, Box 18, Folder 372.

81. Shelley, "To a Sky-Lark" (1820), 304. Dydo believes "Stein obviously knew Shelley's ode," noting that the "skylark recurs frequently in her writing of the 1920s and early 1930s" ("Gertrude Stein," 59n6).

82. Shelley, "To a Sky-Lark," 304.

83. Ibid.

84. Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry" (1821), 516.

85. See Heather Cass White, "How to Have," for another account of "how Stein negotiates her affinities with and divergences from Romantic poetic language" (128).

86. Shelley, "To a Sky-Lark," 304; Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale," 236.

87. Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry," 348. As Gillian White explains, "For those who"—like, I contend, Stein—"think about how lyric has been constructed across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, issues of audience and address have been paramount: Does lyric assume an audience for its supposedly private utterance? To whom (if anyone) is it addressed?" (*Lyric Shame*, 31).

88. Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry," 349 (emphasis mine).

89. Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers, MSS 76, Box 18, Folder 372.

90. Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, 217.

91. Johnson, *Persons and Things*, 6.

92. Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, 169.

93. Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, 185.

94. Ibid.

95. Stein, *Q.E.D.*, 18.

96. Wilde, *Picture of Dorian Gray*, 6.

97. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 23.

98. Retallack, "On Not Not Reading," 23. My count, here, is based on the manuscript version of Stein's poem.

99. Ibid., 24.

100. Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*, 214.

101. Schmitz, "Difference," 134.

102. Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, 169.

103. Recent writing on "queer inhumanism" helps explicate what's necessary, precarious, and queer about Stein's strategy of engaging gossip's possibly dehumanizing objectification as a potential source of pleasure and agency. Mel Chen and Dana Luciano identify the "desire to persist in the face of precarity . . . as the primary catalyst for queer thought in general," and a situation "particularly generative for queer inhumanist thought, since the intensification of precarity in particular contexts tends to push putatively 'human' subjects to the critical edge of that category" ("Has the Queer," 193).

104. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 249; Johnson, *Persons and Things*, 9 (emphasis mine).

105. Waters, *Poetry's Touch*, 2.

106. A suggestive point of comparison for these lyrical moments of address to the beloved is the collection of short love notes passed throughout the 1930s from Stein to Toklas—often accompanying manuscript pages to be typed. These notes are collected by Kay Turner in Stein, *Baby Precious Always Shines*.

107. In order to highlight the resonance of these lines with the passage above from Part III, Stanza IX, I quote in this instance not the manuscript version of the

poem, which reads "Out from the whole wide *word* I chose thee" (emphasis mine), but instead the first and second typescripts, which revise "word" to "world." See appendix D of *Stanzas in Meditation: The Corrected Edition* (278). As with so many of the poem's changes from manuscript to typescript, the textual ambiguity seems pertinent, here, in a passage that suggests how both lyric and gossip create worlds out of words.

108. Johnson, *Persons and Things*, 94.

109. Ibid., 6. Barthes makes the same point, in the context of gossip, in his 1976–1977 lecture course at the Collège de France: "The vocative," he asserts, "is the opposite of gossip," and "in an ideal (utopian) community . . . there would be only direct addresses, presences," thus "making it impossible for people to gossip about one another" (*How to Live Together*, 101).

110. Johnson, *Persons and Things*, 9. In a seminal essay, Jonathan Culler ties such animating address to the lyric, proposing that one might "identify apostrophe with lyric itself" and further reading the apostrophe's "invocation" of an inanimate or absent other as "a figure of vocation," a way that poetic voice "dramatizes its calling" and establishes poetic authority ("Apostrophe," 137, 142).

111. Lewis, "Preliminary Aside," 184.

112. Ibid.

113. *Testimony against Gertrude Stein*, 2, 13 (Eugene Jolas and Georges Braques, respectively).

114. *Testimony against Gertrude Stein*, 13 (Tristan Tzara).

115. Ibid., 12–13.

116. For instance, the gossip columnist O. O. McIntyre included, among items on Tallulah Bankhead and the cartoonist Rube Goldberg, the news that

> Gertrude Stein may remain permanently in the America she has not known for thirty-two years or at least until the storm of her last book in Paris blows over. The autobiography of her secretary, which she penned, resulted in a pooling of resentment that might make Paris a bit uncomfortable. Matisse, the great painter, is in a fury. So is Tzara, who daddied Dadaism. And Jolas, publisher of *Transition*. They claim Gertrude has been talking through her funny-shaped hat.

See Stein's saved copy of the undated syndicated column by McIntyre in the Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers, MSS 76, Box 145, Folder 3368.

117. Lewis, "Preliminary Aside," 183, 184, 185.

118. Ibid., 185.

119. Ibid., 186.

120. Recent discussions of Stein and celebrity are relevant here. See Glass, *Authors Inc.*, 115–138; Goldman, *Modernism*, 81–110; Leick, *Gertrude Stein*; and Mix, "Gertrude Stein's Currency," 93–104.

121. Sarah Bay-Cheng, for instance, links this figure to Stein and identifies it as

"the classical image of the biblical herald—a winged figure with a trumpet" (*Mama Dada*, 1). John Richardson does not identify the figure as a herald but does see Stein in the painting's "ironical apotheosis." He writes, "A group of nudes surround a scroll inscribed with the words 'Homage a Gertrude.' One of the nudes—not unlike Alice—proffers fruit; another—Gertrude?—blows her own distended trumpet" ("Picasso and Gertrude Stein").

122. Brinnin, *Third Rose*, 269.

123. Rieke, *Senses of Nonsense*, 61, 64.

124. Kent, *Making Girls into Women*, 142.

125. Rieke, *Senses of Nonsense*, 66, 68, 85. Edmund Wilson perhaps first suggests this reading of Stein when he concludes that "the vagueness that began to blur [Stein's work] from about 1910 on and the masking by unexplained metaphors that later made it seem opaque, though partly the result of an effort to emulate modern painting, were partly also due to a need imposed by the problem of writing about relationships between women of a kind that the standards of that era would not have allowed her to describe more explicitly" ("Gertrude Stein," 581).

126. Phillips, *Transforming Talk*, 76. In her discussion of gossip and Chaucer's *House of Fame*, Phillips notes how paralipsis (she uses the Latin term *occupatio*) evades common standards of evidence, "straddl[ing] the border between truth and falsehood, the liminal space where gossip thrives" (77). Though far afield from the concerns of Stein's circle, Phillips's discussion of gossip in the late medieval courtroom suggestively speaks to the emphasis critics of Stein's gossip placed, as we have seen, on "testimony" and "witness."

127. Ashbery, "Impossible," 12.

128. Foucault writes, "There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things" (*History of Sexuality*, 27). See also Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 3.

129. A number of seminal feminist accounts of Stein's style postulate, as Margaret Dickie puts its, "Stein's self-censorship, the sexual anxiety that drove her tireless experimental writing, the self-judgment that undercut even her most exaggerated celebrations of her sexual power" ("Recovering the Repression," 20). In addition to Dickie, see especially Fifer, "Is Flesh Advisable?" and "Guardians and Witnesses"; and Stimpson, "The Mind, the Body" and "Gertrude Stein." While I agree with many of the important, central observations of this body of work, including observations about the risks of lesbian representation during Stein's lifetime and the importance of Stein's lived sexual experience for her writing, I ultimately concur with critics like Kent (*Making Girls into Women*, 141-142) and Holbrook, who argue that "the privileging of the referent that inspires a drive to break codes is ill-conceived" when reading work "in which textual eroticism is in play at the level of the signifier" (Holbrook, "Lifting Bellies, Filling Petunias," 752).

130. As quoted in Preston, "Conversation," 191.

131. Stein: "One thing which I have tried to tell Americans . . . is that there can be no truly great creation without passion, but I'm not sure that I have been able to tell them at all. If they have not understood it is because they have had to think of sex first, and they can think of sex as passion more easily than they can think of passion as the whole force of man. Always they try to label it, and that is a mistake." Ibid.

132. Ibid.

133. Spacks, *Gossip*, 11.

134. Porte similarly contends that *Stanzas* "is exquisitely aware of itself as a closed space that reveals and conceals by turns" ("Long Dull Poems," 78).

Chapter Two. "Ain't You Heard?"

1. Van Vechten to Hughes, October 27, 1941, and Hughes to Van Vechten, October 30, 1941, in Bernard, *Remember Me to Harlem*, 192, 193. Van Vechten founded the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection at Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library in 1941, encouraging Hughes to send "ALL THE MANUSCRIPTS YOU CAN GIVE US." Referring to Arthur Schomburg's collection of material on black culture, held at the New York Public Library and including the manuscripts of Paul Laurence Dunbar, he proclaimed to Hughes, "If the Schomburg collection is famous for Dunbar manuscripts, let this one be famous for Hughes!" Hughes agreed to donate his papers to the collection, regularly sending manuscripts and correspondence.

2. See Schoeman, "Gossip and Privacy."

3. Gluckman, "Gossip and Scandal," 313.

4. See the reviews "Negro Poet Sings" (1927), 89, and "Under the Lash" (1927), 100; and Hughes, "Negro Artist" (1926).

5. On the persistent speculation about Hughes's sexuality, see Rampersad, *Life of Langston Hughes*, 1:66–71, 133, 289, and *Life of Langston Hughes*, 2:333–338.

6. The account of Hughes's homosexual experience is reported in Berry, *Langston Hughes*, 38; and in Rampersad, *Life of Langston Hughes*, 1:77. See Hughes, "Blessed Assurance" (1963); "Seven People Dancing" (c. 1961); *Not without Laughter* (1931); and "Cafe: 3 A.M.," in *Montage* (1951).

7. Rampersad, *Life of Langston Hughes*, 2:335.

8. Ibid., 2:336.

9. Ibid. In addition to the biographies of Hughes, Isaac Julien's contemporaneous film *Looking for Langston* (1988) and the controversy surrounding its imaginative meditation on black queer desire in the Harlem Renaissance and beyond brought the question of Hughes's sexuality, and its role in his writing, into sharper public focus. For scholarship that variously takes up the question of Hughes's sexuality, see Banks,

"Gender Performance"; Barrett, "Gaze of Langston"; Bennett, "Langston Hughes" and "Multiple Passings"; Borden, "Heroic 'Hussies'"; Bravmann, "Isaac Julien's *Looking*"; Gates, "Black Man's Burden"; hooks, "Seductive Sexualities"; Jarraway, *Going the Distance*; Nero, "Re/Membering Langston"; Ponce, "Langston Hughes's Queer Blues"; Reimonenq, "Hughes, Langston"; Schwarz, *Gay Voices*; See, "Spectacles in Color"; Tidwell, "Sounds of Silence"; Vogel, "Closing Time"; and Woods, "Gay Re-readings."

10. Rampersad, *Life of Langston Hughes*, 2:432, 434. For the critique of Rampersad, see, for example, Nero, "Re/Membering Langston"; and Reimonenq, "Hughes, Langston"; yet, as bell hooks importantly reminds us, the "tantalizing gap between fact and possibility" renders "all attempts to document, in some exclusive way, Hughes's sexual practice a potential erasure" ("Seductive Sexualities," 196). In this sense, by insisting asexuality be read as a mere cover for homosexuality rather than a sexual practice and identity in its own right, Rampersad's critics might themselves be guilty of effacing Hughes's sexuality. For more on modern celibacy as sexual practice, see Kahan, *Celibacies*.

11. Rampersad, *Life of Langston Hughes*, 2:431.

12. Vogel, "Closing Time," 106. Bravmann makes a similar point in his discussion of Rampersad's biography and *Looking for Langston* ("Isaac Julien's *Looking*).

13. Hughes to Van Vechten, October 30, 1941, in Bernard, *Remember Me to Harlem*, 194.

14. Van Vechten to Hughes, October 11, 1959, and Hughes to Van Vechten, October 12, 1959, in Bernard, *Remember Me to Harlem*, 304, 305.

15. Cvetkovich, "Queer Art," 32.

16. Rampersad, *Life of Langston Hughes*, 2:337.

17. Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence," 6.

18. My framing of Hughes's gossip as (in part) counter-archival practice draws on the past few decades' rich body of work on queer archives. See particularly Butt, *Between You and Me*; Cvetkovich, *Archive of Feelings*; Holmes, "What's the Tea"; Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence"; and, of immediate relevance to my discussion, Vogel, "Closing Time." Although not immediately concerned with queer archival practice, see also Diana Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*.

19. See Hughes, foreword to *Poems from Black Africa* (1963), 507, 508 (emphasis in original). Schultz provides a useful reading of Hughes's use of poetry as archive: in his poem "Prelude," she argues, "Hughes writes into the voids in official records, making his own histories, highlighting the fact that the construction of the archive—of memory—must constantly be tended" (*Afro-Modernist Epic*, 103).

20. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*, 2.

21. Ibid., 26.

22. See Hughes's prefatory note to *Montage* (21). *Montage* appeared in three editions during Hughes's lifetime: in the first edition (1951), in the *Langston Hughes Reader* (1958), and in *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes* (1959). There are a number

of differences among the work's three printings, ranging from the omission and inclusion of select poems, to the removal of the first edition's six section titles, to the varying formatting of titles and text. Because changes in formatting and typography in later editions make the work appear more like a selection of individual poems than one long poem, as Hughes envisioned it, throughout my discussion I refer to the text of the first edition, noting where variations in printings are significant for my reading. This edition is reprinted in *The Collected Works*; further citations of *Montage* will refer to this volume and hereafter appear in the text.

23. Hughes's poem both records the significant role played by jitney cabs in black communities and anticipates later literary explorations of the jitney such as August Wilson's *Jitney*, a two-act play set in a jitney cab station in Pittsburgh's Hill District in 1977.

24. Hughes, "Jitney," 216–217. Hereafter cited in the text.

25. In addition to its appearance in "Jitney" and *Montage*, "Ain't you heard" occurs during a scene of gossip in *When the Jack Hollers* (1936) ("Ain't you heard? *[Whispers to AUNT BILLIE]*") and as a prelude to gossip in *Simple Takes a Wife* (1953) ("Ain't you heard that story about how Jimboy's son was born?"). It also introduces a "jitterbug number" from the musical revue *Tropics after Dark* (1940) ("Ain't you heard about that music, Chicago style?") and a song from *The Organizer: A Blues Opera in One Act* (1940), where gossip perhaps becomes utopian gospel ("Folks, ain't you heard de news./There's another thing to choose:/A brand new world, clear and fine"). See Hughes and Bontemps, *When the Jack Hollers*, 348; Hughes, *Simple Takes a Wife*, 235; Hughes and Bontemps, *Tropics after Dark*, 194; and Hughes, *Organizer*, 55.

26. Spacks, *Gossip*, 3.

27. Abrahams, *Talking Black*, 36–37.

28. Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 199, 196. Hurston memorably describes gossip in the opening scene of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) as autonomous talk, or "Words walking without masters," and imagines the porch itself as giving voice to community gossip (1–2). The space of the porch presents a rural version of the stoop, an urban space of gossip that I will address in my discussion of *Montage.*

29. Barksdale, "Humanistic Techniques," 178.

30. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*, 77.

31. As quoted in Griffin, *"Who Set You Flowin'?,"* 104.

32. Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 226–227.

33. Spacks, *Gossip*, 121.

34. Hricko, *Genesis*, 85.

35. See Foster, "Research on Gossip," 79.

36. On gossip's economics, see Spacks, *Gossip*, 20–22; Rosnow and Fine, *Rumor and Gossip*, 78; and Foster, "Research on Gossip," 84.

37. Hannerz, "Gossip Networks," 57.

38. Most theorists of gossip remark that one of its primary social functions is

simply the recreational pleasure it provides. See, for example, Ben-Ze'ev, "Vindication of Gossip," 16; Foster, "Research on Gossip," 85; Rosnow, "Gossip," 158; Spacks, *Gossip*, 31; and Stirling, "Some Psychological Mechanisms," 262.

39. Gossip, Gluckman asserts, is "part of the very blood and tissue of [community] life"; it is "a privilege which is only extended to a person when he or she is accepted as a member of a group or set" ("Gossip and Scandal," 307, 313).

40. Barksdale, "Humanistic Techniques," 178, 179.

41. Spacks, *Gossip*, 170.

42. Grossman with Halliday, *Sighted Singer*, 149.

43. Culler, "Apostrophe," 142.

44. On September 14, 1948, Hughes wrote breathlessly to Arna Bontemps about "a new book I wrote last week! . . . No kidding—a full book-length poem in five sections called *Montage of a Dream Deferred*. . . . The new poem is what you might call a precedent shattering opus—also could be known as a *tour de force*." Hughes to Bontemps, September 14, 1948, in Nichols, *Arna Bontemps–Langston Hughes Letters,* 236.

45. All editions of *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, for example, print only "Harlem" and "Theme for English B"; it is only with the publication of Jahan Ramazani's 2003 edition of *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry* that a larger selection of nine pieces from *Montage* appears, now under the banner "From *Montage of a Dream Deferred*," which is described in the headnote as a book-long sequence. See Ramazani, Ellman, and O'Clair, *Norton Anthology*.

46. Rampersad, *Life of Langston Hughes*, 2:151–152.

47. Jemie, *Langston Hughes*, 64; Tracy, "Langston Hughes," 111. Despite this critical emphasis on juxtaposed voices, the montage referenced in Hughes's title is usually understood as a filmic, visual technique, in relation to modernist cinema and literature. Wheeler, for example, explores how the voices we seem to hear in *Montage* are produced in part through typography (*Voicing American Poetry*, 81–82). See also Smethhurst, *New Red Negro*, 162; and Brinkman, "Movies, Modernity," which usefully examines "the contrasting expressions of jazz and film" in *Montage* (94).

Without contesting the insights of these accounts of visual montage in Hughes's poem, in what follows my emphasis is on the sonic. I concur with Lisa Hollenbach's assertion of Hughes's keen interest in sonic montage: "Although montage is primarily associated with the medium of film," she writes, "with the introduction of magnetic tape and the portable tape recorder after World War II, recorded sound could for the first time be manipulated as easily as film to make new sound documents both in and out of the studio" ("Sono-Montage," 282). As Hollenbach details, Hughes involved himself in this culture of aural montage, even drafting a recording script, in collaboration with sound documentarian Tony Schwartz, for a never-produced album to be called "Rhythms of Harlem," featuring poems from *Montage* accompanied by an urban soundscape mixed by Schwartz. "If we consider *Montage* in relation to contemporaneous experiments in fragmenting and recombining voice and sound," Hollenbach

contends, "we can better situate Hughes's poem not as a belated modernist work but as a distinctly postwar document, and one particularly attuned to the problems of listening" (283).

48. Brunner, *Cold War Poetry*, 138.

49. Wheeler, *Voicing American Poetry*, 80.

50. Parker, introduction to *Lyric Poetry*, 16.

51. Like Wheeler, many of *Montage*'s readers have productively discussed the poem as, or in relation to, lyric, whether emphasizing its musicality and sequence of voices, or (as I do) the different ways that Hughes's long poem at once engages and presses against received lyric precepts and practice—e.g., by "juxtapos[ing] brief lyrics and scraps of conversation" (Dewey, "Modern American Long Poem," 72) or by presenting "lyric sequences" that form part of "the Modern American epic tradition of the lyric montage" (Smethurst, *Black Arts Movement*, 69).

For more on Jackson's account of the lyricization of poetry, see note 39 in my introduction.

52. Brewster, *Lyric*, 34.

53. David Nowell Smith, *On Voice in Poetry*, 2.

54. Wheeler, *Voicing American Poetry*, 81.

55. Hokanson, "Jazzing It Up," 62, 73, 74.

56. Grossman with Halliday, *Sighted Singer*, 10.

57. Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 213 (emphasis in original).

58. Ibid., 214. Genette, whose analysis is of fictional narratives, distinguishes between narrator and author ("the role of narrator is itself fictive, even if assumed directly by the author") in a manner akin to the concept of the poetic speaker. Without quite doing away with this distinction, for purposes of clarity I nonetheless will continue to refer to Hughes's "poetic" or "authorial" voice. As Genette notes, the confusion between narrator and author is "perhaps legitimate in the case of a historical narrative or a real autobiography" (213); to this I might add the case of the modern poem. *Montage*, which describes itself as a "poem on contemporary Harlem" and grounds itself in the community and experiences of its author, fosters this sort of confusion and, more so, a consideration of the productively ambiguous relation between the poem's organizing presence and Hughes himself.

59. Rampersad and Roessel, introduction to *Collected Poems*, 3.

60. Rampersad, "Origins of Poetry," 695.

61. Wang, *Thinking Its Presence*, 23. See also Reed's discussion of what he terms "racialized reading" in *Freedom Time*, 7–10.

62. See Turner, "Montage of a Simplicity," 22.

63. Henzy, "Langston Hughes's Poetry," 915; and Unterecker, foreword to Jemie, *Langston Hughes*, ix. Among many other examples, Tidwell and Ragar characteristically note that Hughes's "aesthetic vision belied an apparent simplicity" ("Langston Hughes Revisited," 12).

64. Hughes described this aesthetic of simplicity while speaking to the Walt Whitman Foundation; his words were reported in the *Camden Evening Courier*'s March 3, 1927, edition (as quoted in Rampersad, *Life of Langston Hughes*, 1:146).

65. Parker, "Poetry of Harlem" (1951), 389; and Davis, "Book Review" (1951), 385. James Baldwin's famously scathing review of Hughes's *Selected Poems* shares this view of the poet's simplicity as an artful style but judges that art a failure, claiming his "poems [. . .] take refuge, finally, in a fake simplicity in order to avoid the very difficult simplicity of the experience" ("Sermons and Blues").

66. Wheeler, *Voicing American Poetry*, 81.

67. Tiffany, *Infidel Poetics*, 218.

68. Davis, "Book Review," 385.

69. In addition to "Dream Boogie" and "Children's Rhymes," such passages occur in "Figurine" (32), "Figurette" (39), "Flatted Fifths" (46), "Jam Session" (51), "Tag" (51), "Lady's Boogie" (56), and "Likewise" (72).

70. Hokanson, "Jazzing It Up," 73; Wheeler, *Voicing American Poetry*, 81.

71. Ruth Lerrigo Parker, "Book Reviews" (1951), 399; and Baldwin, "Sermons and Blues."

72. Atmore, "Langston Hughes," 293.

73. Turner, "Montage of a Simplicity," 28. For discussion of bop vernacular in *Montage*, see especially Atmore, "Langston Hughes," 293–295; Brunner, *Cold War Poetry*, 137–142; and Tracy, *Langston Hughes*, 230–231.

74. See Burley, *Dan Burley's Original Handbook*, 145, 143. Hereafter cited in the text.

75. Tracy, *Langston Hughes*, 231.

76. In "Preference," a "[y]oung girl" uses "*Daddy*" to refer to an older male lover (31), and in "Question" the term "*daddy*" is likewise used by a "lady" to refer to a male lover (32). In contrast, in his 1949 Simple column for the *Chicago Defender* entitled "Bop," Hughes depicts Simple addressing his male interlocutor with the term "Daddy-o" (*Simple Takes a Wife*, 227).

77. The *Oxford English Dictionary* indicates that "daddy" is "used in jazz slang as a form of address," and more generally in American slang is applied to "a lover." *Cassell's Dictionary of Slang* more specifically dates such use of "daddy" in American slang to the 1920s, when it began to refer to "an older man who is willing to provide the various material desires of his younger mistress or, if homosexual, male lover" and further notes that by the time *Montage* appeared in the 1950s the term could refer generally to "an older male homosexual" (Green, *Cassell's Dictionary of Slang*, 378).

78. Brunner, *Cold War Poetry*, 138. See also Lempert, who finds in the poem's bebop stanzas a "lack of semantic reference" ("Hughes/Olson," 311).

79. Hughes, *Simple Takes a Wife*, 375.

80. Burley's handbook, which draws on material that had appeared in his column for the *New York Amsterdam News*, was preceded by Cab Calloway's 1938 *The New Cab Calloway's Cat-ologue*, a dictionary of two hundred idioms in circulation on Lenox

Avenue, printed as a way of marketing Calloway's Cotton Club Orchestra and later expanded and reprinted as *The New Cab Calloway's Hepster's Dictionary: Language of Jive*.

81. Atmore, "Langston Hughes," 293, 294.

82. Tiffany, *Infidel Poetics*, 18.

83. Burley's assessment, here, resembles Baldwin's remarks on "Negro speech," in his review of Hughes's *Selected Poems*, as "a kind of emotional shorthand—or sleight-of-hand—by means of which Negroes express, not only their relationship to each other, but their judgment of the white world" (Baldwin, "Sermons and Blues").

84. As Hollenbach notes, "What seems like meaningless noise . . . may take on more radical significations for initiated listeners" ("Sono-Montage," 187).

85. Tracy, *Langston Hughes*, 230, 231.

86. Hughes, *Simple Takes a Wife*, 227–228. Ellipses without brackets in original.

87. Ibid., 228. Although his view of the bop talk of *Montage* as "nonlexical performance" neglects the presence and effects of jive slang, Brunner powerfully describes it as "a protest against silencing of all kinds, against an inability to speak and be heard" (*Cold War Poetry*, 138).

88. See Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 189–194.

89. As quoted in the film *Édouard Glissant: One World in Relation*.

90. Moten, "Words Don't Go There," 105. In terms that might serve as an apt description of *Montage* and its poetics of gossip, Moten continues, "These secrets are relayed and miscommunicated, misheard, and overheard, often all at once, in words and in the bending of words, in whispers and screams, in broken sentences, in the names of people you'll never know." And his example of such artistic practice strikingly recalls Hughes's "Jitney": "I'm trying to write the poetry of riding the bus in the city." See also Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 36.

91. Hughes, *First Book of Jazz* (1955), 305.

92. Hughes, *Simple Takes a Wife*, 228.

93. Hughes, *Ask Your Mama* (1961), 85.

94. For the text of his *Selected Poems*, Hughes altered the formatting of this sequence, combining the two pieces under the title "Question [2]" and making "*Figurine*" (now italicized) an indented stage direction that introduced the (now in roman type) exclamation "De-dop!"—setting apart this third voice to similar effect while amplifying its status as a response to "Question." See Hughes, *Collected Poems*, 392. This edition reprints the text of *Montage* (prepared by Hughes) as it appeared in *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes* (Knopf, 1959).

95. This is a question Hughes repeatedly takes up in the opening section of *Montage*, "Boogie Segue to Bop," in which "Question" and "Figurine" appear. See, for example, "Sister" (30) and "Comment on Stoop" (31), "Preference" (31), and "Ultimatum," whose speaker asks, "Baby, how come you can't see me/when I'm paying your bills/each and every week?" (33). In these pieces *Montage* counters the view that would find its most thorough expression in Daniel Patrick Moynihan's controversial

1965 report *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, in which Moynihan problematically frames poverty in urban ghettos as the result of character and culture—particularly pathologized gender and sexual deviations from national ideals—rather than economic structure.

96. By choosing the playful, obscure spaces of the figurine, figurette, and tag as sites of authority in *Montage*, Hughes privileges the ephemeral performances, textually and socially marginal, that have so often served as evidence of queerness. Recalling that he alternately describes the "figurine" in *Ask Your Mama* as a musical "break" ("*the impudent little melody of the old break*"), we could productively think of Hughes's "voice" in *Montage* as occupying the breaks, those moments of disruption that present, in Moten's analysis of the concept, a "location at once internal and interstitial." Meta DuEwa Jones, drawing on Moten, describes the break as embodying "the unnoted yet notated spaces of black performance where the homoerotics of the male-centered jazz ensemble both comes into play and plays *out.*" I will have more to say about the queerness of voice in *Montage* in my concluding section; in anticipation, however, I want to suggest that Hughes's breaks foster such potentially queer, intervening spaces of improvisation within the poem, and that we hear these queer energies in the obscure sonic gesture of the "Figurine" that follows "Question" and unsettles the gender roles of "lady" and "daddy." See Moten, *In the Break*, 85; and Jones, *Muse Is Music*, 80 (which extends Moten, *In the Break*, 152–153).

97. Hughes does not (nor, strictly, do I in this chapter) make the same distinction as Stein between (as discussed in chapter 1) *hearing* speech's intended, referential meaning and *listening* to the sound of speech, if not necessarily its sense. Yet in practice *Montage* revolves around a similar distinction between the semantic and semiotic, evident in the poem's instruction to "[l]isten closely" to obscure, musical talk while constantly deferring any transparent meaning communicated by that talk, as implied by the repeated question, "Ain't you heard?"

98. Brunner, *Cold War Poetry*, 133. In an insight central to my reading of the shared opacity and inventiveness of bop idiom, gossip, and lyric poetry in *Montage*, Jones more generally remarks that the distinctiveness of Hughes's poetry resides in its "overlay of innovations in vernacular, poetic, and musical communities" (*Muse Is Music*, 42).

99. Jemie, *Langston Hughes*, 77.

100. Monique M. Taylor, *Harlem*, 142.

101. Jaworski and Coupland, "Othering in Gossip," 667.

102. Monique M. Taylor, *Harlem*, 142.

103. Ibid., 120.

104. De Jongh, "Poet Speaks," 71.

105. "In my childhood," writes Eugene Walter in "Secrets of a Southern Porch," "the porch was a concept as well as a place" (60). For more on southern porch culture, see Donlon, *Swinging in Place*.

106. De Jongh, "Poet Speaks," 65.

107. For the revised version that appeared in *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes*, see Hughes, *Collected Poems*, 391.

108. Hollander, *Figure of Echo*, 21.

109. Ibid., 31.

110. Herbert, "Heaven," 172. For further examples of the echo song and an extended discussion of the form, see Colby, *Echo Device*.

111. *Montage* treats this theme more directly in the earlier piece "Green Memory," which begins, "A wonderful time—the War:/when money rolled in/and blood rolled out" (42). The echo in "World War II" is thus the echo of an echo, suggesting how voice is inevitably haunted by prior voices.

112. Hollander, *Figure of Echo*, 27.

113. Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 1.5.262.

114. Hokanson, "Jazzing It Up," 69.

115. As with the previous comment sequence, Hughes revised these pieces for *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes* so that "Comment against Lamp Post" and "Figurette" become part of the text of "What? So Soon!," again underscoring their uncertain status within or without the text proper. (He also eliminated the stanza break in the original text of "What? So Soon!," thus clarifying that it is spoken by a single voice.) See *Collected Poems*, 398.

116. Brunner, *Cold War Poetry*, 135.

117. See Green, *Cassell's Dictionary of Slang*, 378, 400; and Major, *Juba to Jive*, 135.

118. Tracy, *Langston Hughes*, 166.

119. Ibid., 165.

120. Ibid., 166.

121. Eavesdropping on party lines, widely recorded in oral histories, was so common that telephone companies' efforts to teach "party-line etiquette" centered on cautioning subscribers against listening in on their neighbors. See Fischer, *America Calling*, 71, 241; and James Everett Katz, *Connections*, 173, 181.

122. Rich, "Party Line," 223.

123. "Whatever its drawbacks," Rich claims, the party line "did enhance community." This conclusion is supported by sociological research like that of Aronson, who similarly asserts that party lines shored up a sense of community in rural areas and, for urban subscribers, helped to counter the prevailing contrast between "the fragmented quality of contemporary urban life" and "an image of warm personal relationships believed to have characterized small towns and urban neighborhoods of an earlier age." See ibid.; and Aronson, "Sociology of the Telephone," 161, 163.

124. Data suggests that by 1930, neither New York City nor Washington, DC, had a single party line, even while shared lines accounted for over 50 percent of telephone service in the Midwest. See Fischer, *America Calling*, 338.

125. See Hughes, "Dear Old Southland" (1947), 83.

126. This connection is emphasized by the "Letter" that immediately follows this sequence in *Montage*, in which a son who has migrated to Harlem addresses his mother in the South (76).

127. See Fischer, *America Calling*, 241.

128. Tracy reads the "third party" in these lines as a euphemism for a cheating partner's lover (see *Langston Hughes*, 166). In concert with my emphasis on the "third party" as an eavesdropping gossip, this interpretation accentuates the illicit erotics of gossip and the way that the analogous figures of the lover and the gossip both seize what might be viewed as private property.

129. Abrahams, *Talking Black*, 54.

130. Hughes, *Big Sea*, 195.

131. Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 234–235, 236.

132. Rampersad, *Life of Langston Hughes*, 2:21.

133. Jaworski and Coupland, "Othering in Gossip," 689.

134. Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate*, 111.

135. Ibid., 121.

136. Ibid.

137. Ibid., 143.

138. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 163.

139. In a 1943 essay for the *Chicago Defender*, one of his first to feature the character of Simple, Hughes depicts Simple as engaging in a mild version of such gossip, poking at the narrator's sense of Louis as flawless hero by suggesting that Louis gets plenty of "sleep in the army," "'cause he's always on furlough. How come Joe Louis is always on furlough?" Hughes, "Here to Yonder," as quoted in Rampersad, *Life of Langston Hughes*, 2:62.

140. Abrahams, *Talking Black*, 77, 78.

141. Chinitz, *Which Sin to Bear?*, 62.

142. My reading of "Cafe: 3 A.M." particularly extends that of Vogel, although he neglects its role in the long poem of which it is a part by treating it in isolation, going so far as to proffer a "confession" that "most of us who do queer Harlem Renaissance studies secretly wish Hughes had written 'Cafe: 3 A.M.' for *The Weary Blues*, rather than for his 1951 collection, *Montage of a Dream Deferred*" ("Closing Time," 111–112, 119).

143. Lowney, "Langston Hughes," 374.

144. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*, 26.

145. For more on the newly aggressive targeting of gay men and women in the early 1950s, see D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 50–51.

146. Shoptaw, "Lyric Incorporated," 123. Lowney similarly describes how "the concluding questions, whose speakers are not identified, heighten the poem's anxiety about gendered categories rather than relieving any tension about who is a 'fairy' or a 'Lesbian,'" and Vogel writes that the piece "suggests the paranoia and surveil-

lance of the early Cold War." See Lowney, "Langston Hughes," 375; and Vogel, "Closing Time," 119.

147. Jaworski and Coupland, "Othering in Gossip," 691.

Chapter Three. "The Dish That's Art"

1. See Berkson, "Frank O'Hara" (1969), 161; and Ginsberg, "Early Poetic Community" (1971), 149.

2. Myers, introduction to *Poets* (1969), 20; and O'Hara, "Rhapsody" (1959), in *Collected Poems*, 326, hereafter cited as *CP.*

3. O'Hara, "Edward Lucie-Smith" (1965), 21.

4. O'Hara, "Larry Rivers: A Memoir" (1965), in *CP*, 512.

5. Ginsberg, "City Midnight Junk Strains" (1966), in *Collected Poems*, 465, 467; Bell, "Poverty of Poetry" (1972), 39.

6. Perloff, *Frank O'Hara*, 3, hereafter cited in the text.

7. Among the many insightful discussions of O'Hara's talk, see Boone, "Gay Language," 59–92; Butt, *Between You and Me*, 95–99; Byron, "Poetic Queertalk," 64–69; Feldman, *Frank O'Hara*, 49–53; Reddy, *Changing Subjects*, 105–127; and Hazel Smith, *Hyperscapes*, 136–153.

8. See in particular Shaw, *Frank O'Hara*; and Epstein, *Beautiful Enemies*. See also Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance* and *Guys Like Us*; Dewey and Rifkin, *Among Friends*; Diggory, "Community 'Intimate' or 'Inoperative'"; Kane, *All Poets Welcome*; Maggie Nelson, *Women*; Rifkin, *Career Moves*; and Wolf, *Andy Warhol*.

9. Spacks, *Gossip*, 4.

10. Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 84.

11. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *On the Margins*, 33.

12. O'Hara, "Edward Lucie-Smith," 12.

13. Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, 80, hereafter cited in the text.

14. O'Hara et al., "5 Participants" (1959), 149, hereafter cited in the text.

15. Such dialogue closely resembles numerous passages in O'Hara's correspondence that find him experimenting with gossip as a *style* as much as or even more than any particular substance. Consider two choice examples. One:

> Irma came out Saturday, Joe Ford Friday night, Norman was at the Elm Tree Sat[urday] night, Irma insulted Friedl, Mimi insulted Norman, and I'm going to insult Arthur Gold as soon as Larry gets up and I can use the phone.

And, two:

> John told me that Jane Wilson was depressed to hear from John Myers (through someone else perhaps) that you hate her. Do you? It reminded me of someone telling you (John M?) that Mike Goldberg hates you. And of course everybody

> hates Larry. I think JM should be given some manual labor to do in the daytime. Now, if you ever hear that *I* hate you, don't believe a single energetic syllable of it. June Allyson is the only one I hate. There must be someone else I hate, but John's line is busy so I can't find out who it is.

See O'Hara to Mike Goldberg, August 26, 1957, and O'Hara to Grace Hartigan, December 20, 1957, Donald Allen Collection of Frank O'Hara Letters.

16. This remark recalls the bon mot, apocryphally attributed to Oscar Wilde, "A true friend stabs you in the front."

17. Gluckman, "Gossip and Scandal," 313; and Spacks, *Gossip*, 4 (emphasis mine). Summarizing extant research on gossip, Foster concludes that "the absence of the third party seems to be a minimal and, for many, sufficient requirement" for defining gossip ("Research on Gossip," 81).

18. See, for example, Abrahams, "A Performance-Centered Approach," 290–301; Derlega and Chaikin, "Privacy and Self-Disclosure," 102–115; Dunbar, "Gossip in Evolutionary Perspective," 100–110; Eckert, "Cooperative Competition," 91–122; Gluckman, "Gossip and Scandal"; Hannerz, "Gossip Networks," 35–59; Noon and Delbridge, "News from Behind," 23–36; and Spacks, *Gossip*.

19. Warren, "Frank . . ." (1973), 74.

20. Ford, introduction to O'Hara, *Selected Poems*, xiii.

21. O'Hara, "A Party Full of Friends" (1951), in *Poems Retrieved*, 24, hereafter cited as *PR*. O'Hara here may have in mind one of Noël Coward's most popular songs, the gossipy, name-rich "I've Been to a Marvellous Party" (1938), with lyrics such as "Poor Grace started singing at midnight,/And didn't stop singing till four;/We knew the excitement was bound to begin/When Laura got blind on Dubonnet and gin/And scratched her veneer with a Cartier pin,/I couldn't have liked it more" (*Lyrics of Noël Coward*, 151).

22. O'Hara's propensity for proper names met with confusion and resistance from even champions of his work; in a 1960 letter to John Ashbery, he complained that *Folder* editor Daisy Aldan had invited him to contribute poems to an anthology with the caveat that she was "not particularly in love with the ones in which lots of friends' names are mentioned, so bear that in mind when choosing." O'Hara to Ashbery, July 14, 1960, Donald Allen Collection of Frank O'Hara Letters.

23. Altieri, *Enlarging the Temple*, 111.

24. Ford, introduction to O'Hara, *Selected Poems*, xiii.

25. Ward, *Statutes of Liberty*, 62.

26. Shaw, *Frank O'Hara*, 79. On the at once intimate and estranging effects of O'Hara's naming, see also Rosenbaum, *Professing Sincerity*, 84–85. Along the lines of Shaw and Rosenbaum, Silverberg asserts, "It is this tension—the *frisson* of intimacy and distance—that gives O'Hara's poetry its unique charge" (*New York School Poets*, 55).

27. Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 234–235.

28. Ibid., 234. Genette here is quoting from Pierre Fontanier's *Commentaire raisonné sur "Les Tropes" de Dumarsais*.

29. Ibid., 236.

30. Koch, "Note" (1964), 26.

31. Schuyler, "Frank O'Hara" (1974), 83.

32. Brainard, "Frank O'Hara" (1968), 168.

33. O'Hara, *Lunch Poems*, back cover.

34. Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 617.

35. Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 236.

36. For the most thorough account of how names function in O'Hara's poetry, see Shaw, *Poetics of Coterie*, 17–47.

37. Schjeldahl, "Frank O'Hara" (1966), 141.

38. Ashbery to O'Hara, April 26, 1951, as quoted in Gooch, *City Poet*, 187.

39. Ashbery, introduction to O'Hara, *CP*, x.

40. Mitchell, "Death" (1978), 144.

41. See Epstein, *Beautiful Enemies*, 86–126.

42. Although he neglects the queer dimensions I find crucial to the question of poetic identity posed by "Prose for the Times," Izenberg helpfully identifies the poem as "a thinly veiled parody of one of the founding stories of the poetic tradition in English—the story of Caedmon's vocation" (*Being Numerous*, 110).

43. O'Hara, "Personism: A Manifesto" (1959), in *CP*, 499.

44. From an interview with Ashbery, February 4, 1988, quoted in Gooch, *City Poet*, 190.

45. Butt, *Between You and Me*, 44, 45. See also Jonathan Katz, "Identification," 49–70; and Sherry, *Gay Artists*, 1–2. For accounts of the postwar climate of suspicion surrounding homosexuality more generally, see D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*; and Corber, *Homosexuality*. I will discuss this climate in more detail in chapter 4.

46. Larry Rivers suggests how common this experience of the sexually suspect artist was when he writes of a night in 1953, "One night late I was working on a piece of sculpture of [O'Hara]. Between poses he was finishing his long poem ['Second Avenue']. Three fat cops saw the light and made their way up to make the 'you call this art and what are you doing here' scene that every N.Y. artist must have experienced" ("Life among the Stones," 493).

A better-known midcentury depiction of pervert poets under suspicion appears in Allen Ginsberg's "A Supermarket in California" (1955), as Walt Whitman, "lonely old grubber," cruises "the grocery boys" while Ginsberg in turn pursues him through the supermarket aisles, "following you, and followed in my imagination by the store detective" (Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 144).

47. O'Hara, "Larry Rivers: A Memoir," in *CP*, 514; O'Hara and Rivers, *Kenneth Koch, a Tragedy*, 129.

48. The later-generation New York School poet Eileen Myles makes a similar gesture in "An American Poem" (1991): "I thought / Well I'll be a poet. / What could be more / foolish and obscure. / I became a lesbian" (*I Must Be Living*, 135).

49. O'Hara to Grace Hartigan, May 21, 1954, Grace Hartigan Papers. In his novel *The Beautiful Room Is Empty*, Edmund White explores the internalized homophobia at work in the culture of gay gossip in 1960s New York in terms remarkably similar to O'Hara's: "We would piously list all the great dead fags of history," he writes, "but if someone mentioned a living conductor or pianist, we'd say contemptuously, 'Who, *her*?' as though 'her' (or 'huh' in New York–ese) homosexuality were instantly disqualifying. Still more damaging to a man's celebrity was the claim that one had actually slept with him. A New York queen would blow on what he pretended were freshly painted nails and say, 'Who? *huh*? *Had* huh'" (*Beautiful Room*, 194).

50. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 23.

51. See Baudelaire's "The Bad Glazier" in *Paris Spleen* (1869), 13. Pióro differently explores O'Hara's work in relation to Baudelairean spleen (but, surprisingly, does not discuss O'Hara's poem "Spleen"); see Pióro, "Certain Kneeness," 86–99.

52. Miller, *Anatomy of Disgust*, 111.

53. O'Hara to Porter, July 7, 1955, Donald Allen Collection of Frank O'Hara Letters.

54. Porter to O'Hara, July 8, 1955, *Material Witness*, 131.

55. O'Hara to Peter Boneham, August 25, 1961, Donald Allen Collection of Frank O'Hara Letters.

56. Miller, *Anatomy of Disgust*, 111.

57. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 23.

58. "Cruising," writes Gooch of O'Hara and his gay friends in the 1950s, "was a big part of all their lives," and "the shadowy parks, subway stations, and ship docks of the city were a libidinal landscape for the young poet, their furtiveness part of a mischievous midsummer night's game" (*City Poet*, 194–197).

59. Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 180. Rosenbaum usefully identifies this queer appropriation of public spaces as "an act crucial to an understanding of O'Hara's walk poetry" (*Professing Sincerity*, 77).

60. Boone, "Gay Language," 83; Reddy, *Changing Subjects*, 117. Reddy curiously argues, in an aside, against those who contend "that a queer poetics governs and dictates O'Hara's literary style," claiming such critics "overlook the fact" that O'Hara's conversational style "is available to writers and speakers of *any* gender or sexuality" and is thus "not contingent upon sexual politics, but rather upon . . . an aesthetic" (168). While I would not want to strictly limit understandings of O'Hara's style to matters of queerness, I am not at all certain, as my discussion makes clear, that one can separate "sexual politics" from the aesthetics of talk in O'Hara. Further, while O'Hara's brand of gossip and conversation may indeed be available to those of any

gender or sexuality, its meanings and its stakes prove dramatically different for queer writers in the 1950s and 1960s.

61. Epstein, *Beautiful Enemies*, 105.

62. Hazel Smith, *Hyperscapes*, 150; Trotter, *Making of the Reader*, 157.

63. Trotter, *Making of the Reader*, 157, 158.

64. New York School poets writing in O'Hara's wake adopted this unconventional view of gossip's objectifying spleen as a form of intimacy and "affection"; see, for example, Ted Berrigan's long poem *Train Ride*, composed in 1971, which pauses to wonder, "Now what shall we talk/about?" and determines, before carrying out precisely this plan, "We could/bitch all our mutual/friends!!" (272).

65. Berkson, "Frank O'Hara," 161.

66. This characteristic of O'Hara's poetic gossip resembles his epistolary gossip, which often similarly uses dish to round up various absent friends in the space of the letter, as seen in this example from a 1955 missive to Kenneth and Janice Koch: "Hal seems to be having success at his job at the Stable Gallery; you may see Morris Golde almost anywhere in a week; Larry is having lunch with me today inexplicably as you might expect; Joe Rivers has been very sick with bronchial infections and stuff; Joan Mitchell is in Paris at the Hotel Pont Royal." O'Hara to Kenneth and Janice Koch, May 23, 1955, Donald Allen Collection of Frank O'Hara Letters.

67. Davidson, *Guys Like Us*, 29.

68. Morreall, "Gossip and Humor," 58.

69. Ashbery, introduction to O'Hara, *CP*, x.

70. "It's called gossip, of course, and it's an obsession of mine," Warhol continues. Warhol and Hackett, *POPism*, 92.

71. Hazel Smith, *Hyperscapes*, 149.

72. Rivers and O'Hara, *Kenneth Koch, a Tragedy*, 130.

73. Ibid., 131.

74. Warhol and Hackett, *POPism*, 93 (emphasis mine).

75. While the poem references a *statue* of O'Hara made by Rivers, the apparent stir caused by this work of art and its subject's penis echoes the controversy generated by O'Hara's then-scandalous pose in Rivers's 1954 painting *O'Hara Nude with Boots*.

My reading of "On Rachmaninoff's Birthday" accords with Brian Glavey's insight, in a discussion of the poem in relation to ekphrasis, that "the poem gradually evacuates the poet's claim to his own subjectivity through a process of being made by others" (*Wallflower Avant-Garde*, 114–118).

76. O'Hara's striking affirmation of being made by others emerges more fully in contrast with his friend and fellow New York School poet John Ashbery's stance in "Worsening Situation" (1975), a poem whose speaker laments, "The name you drop and never say is mine, mine!/Some day I'll claim to you how all used up/I am because

of you but in the meantime the ride/Continues" (Ashbery, *Collected Poems*, 428). Ashbery's "Wet Casements" (1977) similarly suggests the uneasiness of being "all used up" by name-droppers or, as John Shoptaw observes, "how painful objectification can be" (Shoptaw, *On the Outside Looking Out*, 200), issuing, in a concluding couplet, a self-commandment to resist rather than indulge, as O'Hara might, the temptations of gossip about the self: "I shall keep to myself./I shall not repeat others' comments about me" (Ashbery, *Collected Poems*, 508).

77. Ben-Ze'ev, "Vindication of Gossip," 14 (emphasis mine).

78. Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry" (1833), 348.

79. Herring, "Frank O'Hara's Open Closet," 416.

80. O'Hara, "Edward Lucie-Smith," 13. Accounts of the antagonism between O'Hara's poetics and confessional poetry almost uniformly rely as well on a well-travelled piece of critical gossip, "retold," as Daniel Kane writes, "so often that it became legend" (*All Poets Welcome*, 168). This dish, about a 1962 poetry reading featuring the unlikely pairing of O'Hara and Lowell, initially appears in print as no more than a brief aside in Joe LeSueur's 1968 memoir of O'Hara, "Four Apartments," where, in the midst of a discussion of O'Hara's use of the typewriter, LeSueur pauses to note "Poem (Lana Turner has collapsed!)," a piece inspired by a tabloid headline, as one of O'Hara's few "non-typewriter works," in this case written by hand "on the Staten Island ferry on the way out to a reading at Wagner College." "I might add," LeSueur parenthetically adds, shifting into the digressive register of idle talk, "that he opened his reading with the Lana Turner poem, got a good laugh, and was followed by Robert Lowell, who wryly apologized for not having written a poem for the occasion" ("Four Apartments," 48). Plucked from its parentheses, this suggestively bare bit of gossip reappears nearly a decade later in Perloff's seminal 1977 study of O'Hara (*Frank O'Hara*, 13); following Perloff's account, critics have exulted in spinning this gossip into an increasingly stark illustration of the putative opposition between Lowell and O'Hara. Yet, in emphasizing the unsurprising dissimilarities between Lowell and O'Hara, this critical anecdote, I contend, obscures as much as it reveals, muting the odd affinities between these two poets of personal disclosure that in fact give the gossipy account of their differences its particular charge.

81. O'Hara, "Edward Lucie-Smith," 13.

82. Breslin, *From Modern to Contemporary*, 231.

83. Vendler, *Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 1–2.

84. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 249.

85. Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry," 349.

86. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 249.

87. Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry," 349.

88. Connor, "Satan and Sybil," 163.

89. See Wordsworth's preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802), 603, and "Personal Talk" (1807), 269. Emphases mine.

90. For a brief history of the literary critical term "speaker," see Park, "Talking Back." Park demonstrates how the term "speaker," while tacitly present in many of the foundational texts of the New Criticism, does not unseat the term "poet" until the 1950s, most explicitly in Reuben Brower's influential study *The Fields of Light*. Tucker similarly describes how, by 1960, reading for a speaker had become critical "dogma" and a pedagogical "prescription" that "marched readers past the author of a poem to its dramatic speaker" ("Dramatic Monologue," 240).

Jackson and Prins position this emergence of the ahistorical speaker as a central episode in the twentieth-century history of the lyricization of poetry: "In the middle of the century, [the] first-person subject of the poem came to be called 'the speaker,' a dramatic persona considered a fiction made for the purposes of the poem. . . . A fictional person of all times and all places, the first-person speaker of the lyric could speak to no one in particular and thus to all of us" (*Lyric Theory Reader*, 5).

91. In his 1962 introduction to the second edition of the anthology *New Poets of England and America*, which was famously rivaled by the more avant-garde, competing *New American Poetry* anthology in which O'Hara appeared, Robert Pack worries that the American public's shift in attention "from the poem to the personality of the poet" reflects the troubling "assumption . . . that gossip is more interesting than poetry" (Introduction to *New Poets*, 177).

92. Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery*, 100.

93. Breslin, *From Modern to Contemporary*, 231.

94. O'Hara, "Edward Lucie-Smith," 12.

95. Nowottny, *Language Poets Use*, 42.

96. Ibid., 45–46, 44, 42.

97. Culler, "Apostrophe," 135.

98. Myles, "Tim," 228.

99. O'Hara, *CP*, 499.

100. Brady, "Other Poet," 336.

101. See Legman, "Language of Homosexuality," 572, 576.

102. In a canceled note on the manuscript O'Hara writes, "If I called this *Villanelle* it would seem like Empson but I call it *Hangover*" (*CP*, 544).

103. As the poet Elaine Equi writes in an appreciation of "Song," "Dirt is also slang for gossip, dish, the juicy lowdown. Dirt, like talk, is cheap. This connotation of the word seems exceedingly appropriate in helping to characterize O'Hara's style and contribution to contemporary poetry" ("Dirty Poems," 5).

104. In Rosenbaum's words, O'Hara, here, "occupies the position of 'dirt,' embodying what 1950s American society typed as sexually immoral or degraded" (*Professing Sincerity*, 70).

105. As Perloff notes, "In O'Hara's lyric, meditation or description generally gives way to overheard conversation" ("Ecstasy of Always Bursting Forth!," 165).

106. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 249.

Chapter Four. "The Celestial Salon"

1. Pound, *ABC of Reading* (1934), 29. Auden's insistence on gossip's brief shelf life echoes, for example, Kierkegaard, who writes in *The Present Age* (1940), "If we could suppose for a moment that there was a law which did not forbid people talking, but simply ordered that everything that was spoken about should be treated as though it had happened fifty years ago, the gossips would be done for, they would be in despair" (46).

2. Solove, *Future of Reputation*, 8, 11.

3. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 275–276.

4. Auden, *Lectures on Shakespeare* (1946), 86.

5. Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1893), 451.

6. Moffett, *James Merrill*, 155; and Mazzocco, "Right Stuff" (1983), 215.

7. Merrill, *Changing Light*, 4. Hereafter cited in the text.

8. From Shoptaw, "James Merrill," 767; Pettingell, "Voices from the Atom" (1978), 159; Vendler, *Part of Nature*, 213; and Molesworth, "Scripts for the Pageant" (1980), 174.

9. Bedient, "Books Considered," 22.

10. Vendler, *Part of Nature*, 217.

11. See Zimmerman, "Against Apocalypse," 383–385; and Halpern, *Everyday and Prophetic*, 165–166, 183.

12. See, especially, Spacks, *Gossip*.

13. James Merrill Papers, Series 5, Box 15, Folder 14c.

14. *The Book of Ephraim* first appeared in Merrill's Pulitzer Prize–winning volume *Divine Comedies*. *Mirabell's Books of Number* was presented the National Book Award; the complete *Sandover* won the National Book Critics Circle Award.

15. See "Clearing the Title" and "From the Cutting-Room Floor" in *Late Settings*, and "Nine Lives" in *A Scattering of Salts* (in Merrill, *Collected Poems*, 406–410, 463–467, 591–601). *Voices from Sandover*, featuring Merrill as JM, was performed three times in the years 1988 and 1989, and filmed in 1990. For the script, see *Changing Light*, 563–625.

16. Merrill and Jackson, "Plato Club," 51. Hereafter cited in the text. Note that the interview eschews Merrill's standard all-caps presentation of the Ouija's voices.

17. Ephraim's take on "The Plato Club" appears in a Ouija transcript dated September 22, 1991, James Merrill Papers, Series 3, Box 2, Folder 6. The Ouija transcripts that I cite below (as well as some of Merrill's manuscripts and typescripts) can now also be found online as part of Washington University's James Merrill Digital Archive at http://digital.wustl.edu/jamesmerrillarchive/.

18. Merrill, "Interview with Fred Bornhauser" (1983), 136.

19. These lines occur in a draft of the conclusion of the third part of the first

lesson in *Scripts for the Pageant* (see *Changing Light*, 332, for the final version, which omits these lines). From a typescript dated October 29, 1977, and taped into Merrill's notebook of Ouija transcripts, James Merrill Papers, Series 3, Box 1, Folder 1.

20. Hammer, "Frank Bidart," 7, 8.

21. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 23.

22. I maintain the distinction between Merrill and his poem's speaker since, as Yenser notes, *Sandover* "interlaces the realms of reality and fiction": the autobiography and voice of what Merrill calls the poem's "semi-fictional 'JM'" overlaps extensively with, yet also significantly departs from, Merrill's own. See Yenser, *Consuming Myth*, 222; and Merrill, *Different Person* (1993), 521. Where clear, *A Different Person* will hereafter be cited in the text.

23. Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry" (1833), 349.

24. Ibid.

25. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 249.

26. *Sandover*'s fictive account of Rimbaud's ghostly authorship of *The Waste Land* amplifies the actual occult qualities of Eliot's poem. As Dean observes, "In his understanding of impersonality as a technique for establishing 'relations to the dead,' Eliot tacitly connected the modern poet with the medium or clairvoyant" ("T. S. Eliot, Famous Clairvoyante," 57).

27. JM often equivocates about his part in what he calls, in *Ephraim*—referencing the famous nineteenth-century Russian spiritualist Helena Blavatsky and the early twentieth-century Greek American mystic George Ivanovich Gurdjieff—"This great tradition that has come to grief/In volumes by Blavatsky and Gurdjieff" (136). For discussions of *Sandover* within an occult literary tradition, see Materer, *Modernist Alchemy*, 157–178; Sword, *Ghostwriting Modernism*, 132–158; and Johnston, *Precipitations*, 99–127.

28. Merrill was keenly aware of the discourse surrounding government investigations targeting Communists and homosexuals; in a journal entry from April 1954 he reports that he and Jackson listened, "fascinated," to the highly publicized Army-McCarthy hearings on the radio, and in May Merrill continued to mull over the hearings' implications in what Hammer describes as "a cynical political poem, never completed, called 'The Hearings.'" See Hammer, *James Merrill*, 182.

29. D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 44; and Sherry, *Gay Artists*, 1–2.

30. Butt, *Between You and Me*, 44.

31. Ibid., 45.

32. Merrill, "Interview with J. D. McClatchy" (1982), 107.

33. Butt, *Between You and Me*, 45.

34. Ibid., 73.

35. Merrill copied this poem into a notebook from the early 1950s (James Merrill Papers, Series 2, Box 4, JNL 28). Though no year is recorded for this entry (only "7

Jan."), it appears to date from 1953. Daniel George is the pseudonym of the English writer Daniel George Bunting; "Publicity" first appears in his *Alphabetical Order: A Gallimaufry* (1949), where it is dated 1933.

36. Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry," 349.

37. Ouija transcript dated November 14, 1953, James Merrill Papers, Series 3, Box 3, Folder 13. In *Sandover*, JM stumbles upon a fictional version of this transcript, dated "x.1953" and tucked in a copy of Alexander Gilchrist's *The Life of William Blake* (178).

38. As quoted in Jonathan Katz, *Gay American History*, 91.

39. D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 43.

40. Ibid., 46.

41. Merrill to Meredith, July 7, 1951, James Merrill Papers, Series 2, Box 4, NL 55. In "a postscript about the letters" in a letter to his mother, Merrill again references the break-in, writing, "I will take whatever blame you like, for not having, as you recommend, a steel file or something (though if one can break into an apartment, one can break into a file); and while I understand too well to feel any resentment towards *you*, I must say that I'm very distressed by your action." Merrill to Hellen Ingram Plummer, July 5, 1951, James Merrill Papers, Series 2, Box 4, NL 55.

42. While the date of the source Ouija transcript for this passage—September 29, 1973, the very day of Auden's death—makes it impossible that Merrill here refers to the announcement Auden's executors would shortly place in the *Times Literary Supplement* stating his will's instructions that all letters from him should be burned, perhaps Merrill knew of Auden's intentions. In addition, Firchow wonders whether "Merrill was aware that Auden had left behind in Oxford the journal he kept during the latter part of his stay in Berlin in 1929. According to Auden's friend, David Luke, who found the journal in the former's Oxford apartment a few days after his death, much of it is 'intimately autobiographical'" (*W. H. Auden*, 248n17). More generally, numerous anecdotes recall Auden's oft-expressed wish to destroy, as he put it in a 1972 poem, "note-books and sketches that were never intended for" "the Public" (Auden, *Collected Poems*, 857). To give one lively example: James Schuyler, who typed poems for Auden on various stays with him, writes in an elegy: "when he learned that in Florence / I and my friend Bill Aalto had / fished his drafts of poems / out of the wastepaper basket, / he took to burning them, saying, / 'I feel like an ambassador burning / secret papers.'" "Wystan Auden" (1973), in Schuyler, *Collected Poems*, 242–244.

43. The Ouija transcripts are figured as a source of corruption in these lines' allusion to Prospero's renunciation of his magic in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (5.1.33–57), an allusion that stresses the occult dangers of the Ouija and reiterates JM's contention, in section Y, "Better to stop / While we still can" (89). But whereas Prospero voluntarily "drown[s]" his "book," choosing life over art, JM and DJ, twenty years on, "dig up" theirs, making art out of life.

Though again not in overtly sexual terms, JM also positions the transcripts as incriminating "private" documents destined to circulate publicly, and scandalously, if not destroyed when he compares them to the Nixon tapes: "Impeachment ripens round the furrowed stone/Face of a story-teller who has given/Fiction a bad name (I at least thank heaven/For my executive privilege vis-à-vis/Transcripts of certain private hours with E)" (41).

44. Yenser, *Consuming Myth*, 236.

45. As Wasley notes of JM's decision to preserve the transcripts, "In a very literal sense, *Sandover* has its origins in a reading and a rewriting of Auden" (*Age of Auden*, 103).

46. Ouija transcript dated July 4, 1982, James Merrill Papers, Series 3, Box 1, Folder 2.

47. Merrill's pre-*Sandover* oeuvre contains a handful of disparate attempts to work with the Ouija material. He first wrote about the Ouija in "Voices from the Other World," which appeared in 1957 and again in *The Country of a Thousand Years of Peace* (1959); "Words for the Familiar Spirit," from 1959, was later included in the privately-printed *The Yellow Pages* (1974); and, in Merrill's 1957 family roman à clef, *The Seraglio*, Francis Tanning's occult experiences with the Ouija resemble Merrill's own. Both *Ephraim* and "The Will," also included in *Divine Comedies*, painstakingly narrate the Ouija material's more substantive false start, in the late 1960s, as an eventually lost novel. See *Collected Poems*, 112–113, 719–720, 392–398; and *Seraglio*.

48. Vendler, *Part of Nature*, 206; Gwiazda, *James Merrill*, 55. Shetley usefully complicates this take on Merrill's work, arguing that, "Rather than a progression from closed to open, private to public, Merrill's development is informed by a tension between public and private modes of expression" (*After the Death of Poetry*, 66).

49. Love, *Feeling Backward*, 34.

50. Gery, *Nuclear Annihilation*, 133.

51. Moffett, *James Merrill*, 154. The importance of nuclear anxiety to Merrill's poem has become increasingly axiomatic: among many others, Bloom describes *Sandover* as "an apocalyptic epic whose true starting point is Hiroshima" (introduction to *Modern Critical Views*, 7); Yenser asserts that the final volume's "central question is whether humanity can save itself from destruction" (*Consuming Myth*, 288); Shoptaw includes *Sandover* as "part of a growing antinuclear poetry in the seventies" ("James Merrill," 762); and McHale calls the poem "a jeremiad against the threats of nuclear war and destruction of the environment" (*The Obligation*, 52). For discussions focused specifically on the nuclear theme in *Sandover*, see Berger, "Merrill and Pynchon," 282–297; Zimmerman, "Against Apocalypse"; and, especially, Materer, *James Merrill's Apocalypse*.

52. Merrill, "The Will" (1976), in *Collected Poems*, 396.

53. Davies, *Whitman's Queer Children*, 134.

54. Coviello, "Apocalypse from Now On," 42.

55. In a poem rife with contingency, JM and DJ continually stumble over "A BASIC PRECEPT U WILL NEED TO TAKE ON FAITH: THERE IS / NO ACCIDENT" (179).

56. May, *Homeward Bound*, 91.

57. Edelman, "Tearooms and Sympathy," 168.

58. Reumann, *American Sexual Character*, 189.

59. Frank O'Hara seems to gesture at this notion of the effeminate, queer artist as national threat in his 1962 "Poem (Hoopla! yah yah yah)," writing: "a gossipy novel can sink a ship" (*Poems Retrieved*, 223).

60. Rohy, "On Homosexual Reproduction," 102, 108 (emphasis in original).

61. Johnston, *Precipitations*, 125.

62. Ibid. Yenser also believes that the term used throughout the poem to describe the necessary response to the universe's destructive forces—"contained"—is "reminiscent of the cold war" doctrine of containment (*Consuming Myth*, 295).

63. Merrill to Hellen Ingram Plummer, September 2, 1955, James Merrill Papers, Series 1.1a.

64. Ouija transcript dated August 30, 1978, James Merrill Papers, Series 3, Box 1, Folder 2.

65. Ouija transcript dated January 14, 1977, James Merrill Papers, Series 3, Box 1, Folder 1. See *Changing Light*, 419, for the final version of this scene.

66. This early transcript, on loose paper, foregoes the typical uppercase presentation of the spirits' voices. From a journal entry dated "Jan 8, 57. Jaipur," James Merrill Papers, Series 2, Box 5, JNL 4. All errors in original; ellipsis mine.

67. Krock, "Jenkins Case."

68. Ouija transcript dated January 23, 1977, James Merrill Papers, Series 3, Box 1, Folder 1.

69. Edelman, "Tearooms and Sympathy," 163.

70. As Yenser points out, Merrill had no such niece, providing the poem's most explicit evidence of how poet and persona are not to be neatly conflated. See *Consuming Myth*, 222.

71. McHale, *Obligation*, 40.

72. Ibid., 41.

73. Lurie, *Familiar Spirits*, 136, 106–107.

74. Merrill, "Interview with J. D. McClatchy," 109.

75. Koestenbaum, *Double Talk*, 9. (For an excellent reading of the queer dimensions of Pound and Eliot's collaboration, see 112–140.)

76. Ibid., 3. Of course, unlike the often-repressed erotics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century collaborations Koestenbaum considers, *Sandover* foregrounds the *literal* and figurative sexual relationship between Merrill and Jackson and the spirits they contact, emphasizing even more explicitly how figures of reproduction and authorship, sexual and literary politics, are bound up.

77. Gwiazda, *James Merrill*, 67, 68.

78. Sastri, *James Merrill*, 87.

79. Merrill, *Different Person*, 626. For another discussion of the theme of childlessness in *Sandover*, see Davies, *Whitman's Queer Children*, 149–154.

80. Merrill, "Interview with Thomas Bolt" (1991), 159.

81. Plato, *Symposium*, 46, 47. *Sandover* is enamored of symposiums: JM describes the lessons as a "symposium" (377), in the coda we learn from MM that JM's poetry reading will be followed by a "CRITICAL SYMPOSIUM" (540), and JM describes himself and DJ at the Ouija as Ephraim's "symposiasts" (553). For another discussion of *Sandover*'s engagement with Plato, see Gwiazda, *James Merrill*, 70–74. For a more general discussion of the significance of invocations of Plato for a gay male literary tradition, see Woods, *Articulate Flesh*, 96–103.

82. Diotima declares of the "rites of love" that their "purpose . . . if they are performed correctly, is to reach the final vision of the mysteries." Plato, *Symposium*, 47.

83. Maria eventually appears "as Plato" in *Scripts for the Pageant* and gives "A LIVELY / SYMPOSIUM" (496).

84. Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, 183.

85. Plato, *Symposium*, 3, 4.

86. Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, 183.

87. "Transfigured Bird" and "The Peacock" each appear in Merrill's *First Poems* (1951), in *Collected Poems*, 33–36, 39.

88. Vendler argues that the poem's "espousal of the conversational as the ultimate in linguistic achievement is a moral choice, one which locates value in the human and the everyday rather than in the transcendent" (*Part of Nature*, 217); and Zimmerman emphasizes the "mutuality" of how "in conversation, one voice depends upon its counterpart; the interplay requires both self and other—and *Sandover* locates authority or truth precisely *in* this interplay" ("Against Apocalypse," 383–384). Halpern stresses a conversational "equality" in the poem and, echoing both Vendler and Zimmerman, asserts the poem's "moral . . . emphasis on conversation and the values of the everyday" (*Everyday and Prophetic*, 183).

89. Ouija transcript dated January 14, 1977, James Merrill Papers, Series 3, Box 1, Folder 1.

90. Merrill, "Interview with Fred Bornhauser," 136, 138.

91. Kalstone, "Persisting Figures," 144; McHale, *Obligation*, 25.

92. Vendler, *Part of Nature,* 220–221; Lehman, "Elemental Bravery," 50.

93. See Benson, *Lucia in London* (1927), in *Make Way for Lucia*, 179–358. The intertextual relation between *Sandover* and the Lucia novels awaits investigation. In the poem's later volumes, Robert Morse (or RM) charms heaven with his "E F BENSON BABYTALK," and *Sandover*'s chats are frequently punctuated by the mangled French of the Bensonian valediction "AU RESERVOIR" (257). Merrill himself emphasized—

with appropriate camp frivolity—the importance of the Lucia novels for his work; when asked how much familiarity with his source material he expected of his readers, he replied, "Ideally a reader might happen to know, let's say, about a third of these things, might have read Proust but not Dante or E. F. Benson" ("Interview with Fred Bornhauser," 138). As this unlikely lineup (has the phrase "Dante or E. F. Benson" ever again been uttered?) suggests, Benson's camp gossip lurks at the fringe of *Sandover*'s poetic tradition: describing, in an unpublished Ouija transcript, the "THRONG" of "AMERICAN 'GREATS' " gathered "BEYOND THE HEDGE" at Sandover—including Wallace Stevens, Robert Frost, and T. S. Eliot—RM notes, "OFF AT THE EDGE RATHER SHYLY . . . WAS E. F. B." Later, the fictive Byron's "GREAT GOSSIP" causes RM to remark of Sandover, "IT MIGHT OFTEN BE THE GREEN AT RISEHOLME." Transcript dated September 18, 1977, James Merrill Papers, Series 3, Box 1, Folder 2.

94. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 116.

95. Auden, "In Defence of Gossip" (1937), 427.

96. Edmund White, "Inverted Type," 48.

97. Materer, *James Merrill's Apocalypse*, 115.

98. Foucault, "Friendship as a Way," 308.

99. Ibid., 311.

100. Ouija transcript dated July 27, 1975, James Merrill Papers, Series 3, Box 1, Folder 1.

101. Foucault, "Friendship as a Way," 309.

102. Merrill, "Poet's Notebook" (1995), 33.

103. It is unclear whether Merrill was familiar with the more contemporary literary model of occult collaboration provided by Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes. Plath's long "Dialogue Over a Ouija Board," written circa 1957–1958, wasn't published until after the three volumes of *Sandover*, when it appeared in the notes of her *Collected Poems* (1981), edited by Hughes; the shorter "Ouija" first appeared posthumously in the 1971 collection *Crossing the Water*. The fraught Ouija sessions of Plath and Hughes—and the poems resulting from them, including Hughes's retrospective "Ouija" (1998)—provide both another example of the board's surprising role in representing (and enacting) the gendered dynamic of heterosexual marriage and an interesting juxtaposition to Merrill and Jackson's queer collaboration. See Plath, *Collected Poems*, 77–78, 276–287; and Hughes, *Birthday Letters*, 53–56. For a sharp comparison of the workings and stakes of Plath's and Merrill's Ouija poetry, see Sword, *Ghostwriting Modernism*, 132–148.

104. Shoptaw, "James Merrill," 759.

105. Gunn, "Heroic Enterprise" (1979), 157.

106. Merrill, "Interview with J. D. McClatchy," 110.

107. Brooks and Warren, *Understanding Poetry*, 112. The final, 1976 edition of the textbook (following previous editions in 1938, 1950, and 1960) includes slight (though significant) revisions of its description of tone; nonetheless, I quote from it

because it gives the best sense of the current status of New Critical ideas of tone and lyric reading during the composition of *Sandover*.

108. Wheeler also notes the tonal uncertainty of *Sandover*'s Ouija-based composition. See *Voicing American Poetry*, 105.

109. Merrill, "Interview with Helen Vendler" (1979), 88. Images of Merrill's Ouija transcripts and their relentless, unbroken string of handwritten characters can be viewed online at the James Merrill Digital Archive, http://digital.wustl.edu/jamesmerrillarchive/.

110. Merrill, "Interview with J. D. McClatchy," 107.

111. David Jackson, "DJ" (1979), 44.

112. Merrill, "Interview with Helen Vendler," 85.

113. Merrill, "Education" (1988), 13.

114. Richards, *Practical Criticism*, 175, 198.

115. Brower, *Fields of Light*, 19.

116. Ibid., 29.

117. Frost to John T. Bartlett, May 30, 1916, in *Selected Letters*, 204.

118. See Brower, *Fields of Light*, 43, 116.

119. Merrill, "Interview with Donald Sheehan" (1968), 55. Merrill frequently refers to Brower's teaching; in a 1982 essay he evokes his time "at Amherst, reading . . . Jane Austen and Pope with Reuben Brower" ("Acoustical Chambers," 7), while in his 1988 lecture, "The Education of the Poet," he describes "an hour during my senior year at Amherst," during which "Reuben Brower and I were looking at . . . lines by Pope" (13). For more on Merrill's studies with Brower at Amherst, see Hammer, *James Merrill*, 80–81, 102.

120. Frost to Sidney Cox, January, 19, 1914, in *Selected Letters*, 107.

121. Frost to John T. Bartlett, February 22, 1914, Frost to Walter Prichard Eaton, September 18, 1915, and Frost to John T. Bartlett, July 4, 1913, in *Selected Letters*, 111, 192, 80.

122. Merrill, "Interview with Donald Sheehan," 51.

123. Ibid.

124. Hammer, "Frank Bidart," 13, 7.

125. Jackson, "DJ," 25.

126. Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 29, 30. Hereafter cited in the text.

127. Kalstone, "Persisting Figures," 143.

128. Jackson, "DJ," 38; Merrill, "Interview with J. D. McClatchy," 109.

129. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 23.

130. Frost to John T. Bartlett, 4 July 1913, in *Selected Letters*, 80.

131. Recalling this incident over the board, Frost complains, "PEOPLE WON'T TALK ABOUT MY PHYSICAL LOVE OF EZRA. MOST GOODLOOKING + PHYSICAL MAN. I WAS W/OUT MY WIFE (AS FREQUENTLY) + EP + I EXPERIMENTED SO I DO KNOW AS I TOLD WS, SOMETHING ABOUT IT. GAVE IT UP AS I COULD SEE EP'S

VANITY WD DO US BOTH IN, BUT NEVER EXPERIENCED LOVE AGAIN. WROTE MANY A TRASHY POEM + WAS CRUELLY HURT WHEN EP TOLD ME SO." At this, Pound suddenly appears to declare, "RF WRONG I QUITE LOVE HIM + WAS NO INITIATE IN THAT FRAT." When Merrill invokes the gossip of the bath, interjecting, "The glimpse of you he gives on first meeting, rising from the bathtub . . . ," Pound insists, "+ WENT STRAIGHT AT IT TOO! POOR FROST NOT HAVING RELEASED HIMSELF FOR A MONTH, QUITE A TERROR, HAH! YES YOU WERE BOB!" See Ouija transcript dated July 20, 1978, James Merrill Papers, Series 3, Box 1, Folder 2.

132. Frost to John T. Bartlett, July 4, 1913, in *Selected Letters*, 80.

133. Frost to William Stanley Braithwaite, March 22, 1915, in *Selected Letters*, 159.

134. See Burnshaw, *Robert Frost Himself*, 253. For similar remarks by Frost on the topic of gossip, see Frost, *Robert Frost*, 108; and Frost, *Interviews with Robert Frost*, 176.

135. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 23; Frost to Walter Pritchard Eaton, September 18, 1915, in *Selected Letters*, 191.

136. Merrill, *Different Person*, 469.

137. Merrill, "Acoustical Chambers," 3.

138. Ibid., 7–8.

139. Merrill's interest in the social and formal architecture of poetry recalls, especially, Stein's in *Stanzas in Meditation*.

140. Merrill, "Poets at Home" (1963), in *Collected Poems*, 812. Hereafter cited in the text.

141. Gwiazda, *James Merrill*, 126.

142. Merrill certainly would have been familiar with, and may have taken inspiration from, Brower's analysis in *The Fields of Light* of tone and its role in the design of Pope's *Epistle to Burlington*, a poem that conducts, like *Sandover* and "Poets at Home," a satirical tour of a manor estate, during which we hear, Brower writes, "the cultivated voice of a guide speaking" (*Fields of Light*, 146).

143. Richards, *Practical Criticism*, 198.

144. Merrill, "Interview with Donald Sheehan," 58.

145. Ibid.

146. Merrill, "*Changing Light*," 11.

Coda

1. Merrill, *Changing Light*, 5.

2. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 275–276.

3. As Brian Reed observes, "Instead of striving to compose well-crafted verse that conveys their unique insights, emotions, and experiences, many poets have resorted

to redirecting language: appropriating others' words, redacting them, and presenting them as their own" ("In Other Words," 759).

4. See Perloff, *Unoriginal Genius*; and Brian Reed, "In Other Words," 760.

5. Shaw, *Fieldworks*, 251.

6. Spahr, *Everybody's Autonomy*, 14–15.

7. See Spahr, "Turnt" (2015), in *That Winter*, 81–85; and Spahr and Buuck, *Army of Lovers* (2013), 9, 11.

8. Spahr, *This Connection*, 57, 58. Hereafter cited in the text.

9. See especially Keller, "Post-Language Lyric."

10. Lyn Hejinian and Travis Ortiz, directors and editors of Atelos Press, explain in the volume's back matter that Atelos "is devoted to publishing, under the sign of poetry, writing that challenges conventional, limiting definitions of poetry."

11. Spahr, *Transformation*, 173, 21.

12. Rogoff, "Gossip as Testimony," 79.

13. O'Hara, "Ode: Salute to the French Negro Poets" (1958), in *Collected Poems*, 305.

14. As quoted in Harris, "John Keene."

15. Keene, *Counternarratives*, 271. Hereafter cited in the text.

16. Hughes, "Poem (To F. S.)," 55; and "Desire," in *Collected Poems*, 105.

17. Villaurrutia, "North Carolina Blues," 23.

18. Hughes, foreword to *Poems from Black Africa*, 507, 508; Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, 467.

19. Myles, *Inferno (A Poet's Novel)*, 207.

20. In a 2001 interview, Myles says of their time as James Schuyler's assistant: "He was finishing *The Morning of the Poem* (1981) when I first started to work with him. His social style was always an enactment of [the poem]. I would come tell him about last night, and he would talk about the old days. Poetry is gossip." See Myles, "Interview with Eileen Myles."

21. Cooper, Review of *Maxfield Parrish*, 26.

22. O'Hara, *Collected Poems*, 499.

23. Myles, "How to Write," 159.

24. Myles, *Snowflake*, 29, 84. Hereafter cited in the text.

25. Myles, "Poetics Statement," 241.

26. Myles, interview with Edward Foster, 60.

27. García-Montes, Caballero-Muñoz, and Pérez-Álvarez, "Changes," 77.

28. James Everett Katz, "Mobile Communications," 68 (emphasis mine).

29. See Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 249.

30. Myles, *Inferno (A Poet's Novel)*, 159.

31. Merrill, *Changing Light*, 260.

32. Ibid., 100.

33. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 23.
34. Ibid.
35. Powell, "Elegy's Structures," 83, 85.
36. Powell, "Turning the Paper."
37. Powell, *Repast*, 4. Hereafter cited in the text.
38. Burt, "Here Is the Door," 118.

Bibliography

Abelove, Henry. *Deep Gossip*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

Abrahams, Roger D. "A Performance-Centered Approach to Gossip." *Man* 5 (1970): 290–301.

———. *Talking Black*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1976.

Abrams, M. H. "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric." In *The Correspondent Breeze: Essays on English Romanticism*, 76–108. New York: W. W. Norton, 1984.

Amin, Kadji, Amber Camilla Musser, and Roy Pérez. "Queer Form: Aesthetics, Race, and the Violences of the Social." *ASAP/Journal* 2.2 (2017): 227–239.

Adorno, Theodor W. "On Lyric Poetry and Society." In *Notes to Literature*, vol. 1, edited by Rolf Tiedemann, translated by Shierry Weber Nicholsen, 37–54. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.

Altieri, Charles. *Enlarging the Temple: New Directions in American Poetry during the 1960s*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1979.

Aronson, Sidney H. "The Sociology of the Telephone." *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 12.153 (1971): 153–167.

Ashbery, John. *Collected Poems 1956–1987*. Edited by Mark Ford. New York: Library of America, 2008.

———. "The Impossible." In *Selected Prose*, edited by Eugene Richie, 11–15. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005.

———. Introduction to *Collected Poems*, by Frank O'Hara, vii–xi.

Atmore, Henry. "Langston Hughes." In *The Cambridge Companion to American Poets*, edited by Mark Richardson, 286–299. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Auden, W. H. *Collected Poems*. Edited by Edward Mendelson. New York: Vintage, 1991.

———. "In Defence of Gossip." In *Prose and Travel Books in Prose and Verse*, vol. 1, *1926–1938*, edited by Edward Mendelson, 425–429. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

———. *Lectures on Shakespeare*. Edited by Arthur Kirsch. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Baldwin, James. "Sermons and Blues." Review of *Selected Poems*, by Langston Hughes. *New York Times*, March 29, 1959.

Banks, Kimberly J. "Gender Performance and Sexual Subjectivity in *Not without Laughter*: Sandy's Emergent Masculinity." In *Montage of a Dream*, edited by John Edgar Tidwell and Cheryl R. Ragar, 86–105.

Barksdale, Richard Kenneth. "Humanistic Techniques Employed in Hughes's Poetry." In *Praisesong of Survival: Lectures and Essays, 1957–89*, 169–182. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992.

Barrett, Lindon. "The Gaze of Langston Hughes: Subjectivity, Homoeroticism, and the Feminine in *The Big Sea*." *Yale Journal of Criticism* 12 (1999): 383–397.

Barthes, Roland. *Empire of Signs*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982.

———. *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces: Notes for a Lecture Course and Seminar at the Collège de France (1976–1977).* Translated by Kate Briggs. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

———. *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1978.

———. *The Neutral: Lecture Course at the Collège de France (1977–1978)*. Translated by Rosalind E. Krauss and Denis Hollier. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

———. *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*. Translated by Richard Howard. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977.

Baudelaire, Charles. *Paris Spleen*. Translated by Louise Varèse. New York: New Directions, 1970.

Bay-Cheng, Sarah. *Mama Dada: Gertrude Stein's Avant-Garde Theater.* London: Routledge, 2004.

Bedient, Calvin. "Books Considered." *New Republic*, June 5, 1976: 22–23.

Bell, Pearl K. "The Poverty of Poetry." In *Frank O'Hara: To Be True to a City*, edited by Jim Elledge, 38–39. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990.

Bennett, Juda. "Langston Hughes on the Open Road: Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Question of Presence." In *Montage of a Dream*, edited by John Edgar Tidwell and Cheryl R. Ragar, 68–85.

———. "Multiple Passings and the Double Death of Langston Hughes." *Biography* 23.4 (2000): 670–93.

Benson, E. F. *Make Way for Lucia.* New York: Harper & Row, 1986.

Benveniste, Emile. *Problems in General Linguistics*. Translated by Mary Elizabeth Meek. Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1971.

Ben-Ze'ev, Aaron. "The Vindication of Gossip." In *Good Gossip*, edited by Robert F. Goodman and Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, 11–24.

Berger, Charles. "Merrill and Pynchon: Our Apocalyptic Scribes." In *James Merrill:*

Essays in Criticism, edited by David Lehman and Charles Berger, 282–297. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.

Berkson, Bill. "Frank O'Hara and His Poems." In *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, edited by Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur, 161–165.

Berkson, Bill, and Joe LeSueur, eds. *Homage to Frank O'Hara*. Bolinas: Big Sky, 1978.

Bernard, Emily, ed. *Remember Me to Harlem: The Letters of Langston Hughes and Carl Van Vechten*. New York: Vintage, 2002.

Berrigan, Ted. *Train Ride.* 1978. In *The Collected Poems of Ted Berrigan*, edited by Alice Notley with Anselm Berrigan and Edmund Berrigan, 241–285. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

Berry, Faith. *Langston Hughes: Before and Beyond Harlem.* Westport, CT: Hill, 1983.

Bloom, Harold. Introduction to *Modern Critical Views: James Merrill*, edited by Harold Bloom, 1–7. New York: Chelsea House, 1985.

Boone, Bruce. "Gay Language as Political Praxis: The Poetry of Frank O'Hara." *Social Text* 1 (1979): 59–92.

Borden, Anne. "Heroic 'Hussies' and 'Brilliant Queers': Genderracial Resistance in the Works of Langston Hughes." *African American Review* 28 (1994): 333–345.

Bowers, Jane Palatini. *"They Watch Me as They Watch This": Gertrude Stein's Metadrama*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991.

Brady, Andrea. "The Other Poet: Wieners, O'Hara, Olson." In *Don't Ever Get Famous: Essays on New York Writing after the New York School*, edited by Daniel Kane, 317–347. Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2006.

Brainard, Joe. "Frank O'Hara." In *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, edited by Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur, 167–169.

Bravmann, Scott. "Isaac Julien's *Looking for Langston*: Hughes, Biography and Queer(ed) History." *Cultural Studies* 7 (1993): 311–323.

Breslin, James. *From Modern to Contemporary: American Poetry, 1945–1965.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Brewster, Scott. *Lyric*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

Bridgman, Richard. *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Brinkman, Bartholomew. "Movies, Modernity, and All that Jazz: Langston Hughes's 'Montage of a Dream Deferred.'" *African American Review* 44.1–2 (2011): 85–96.

Brinnin, John Malcolm. *The Third Rose: Gertrude Stein and Her World.* Boston: Little, Brown, 1959.

Bromfield, Louis. "Gertrude Stein, Experimenter with Words." In *Critical Response to Gertrude Stein*, edited by Kirk Curnutt, 63–65.

Brooks, Cleanth, and Robert Penn Warren. *Understanding Poetry*. 4th ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976.

Brower, Reuben. *The Fields of Light: An Experiment in Critical Reading.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1951.

Brunner, Edward. *Cold War Poetry: The Social Text in the Fifties Poem.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001.

Burley, Dan. *Dan Burley's Original Handbook of Harlem Jive.* New York: Dan Burley, 1944.

Burnshaw, Stanley. *Robert Frost Himself*. New York: George Braziller, 1986.

Burt, Stephen. "Here Is the Door Marked *Heaven*." In *Close Calls with Nonsense: Reading New Poetry*, 117–127. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2009.

———. "What Is This Thing Called Lyric?" *Modern Philology* 113.3 (2016): 422–440.

Butt, Gavin. *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948–1963*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.

Byron, Stuart. "Poetic Queertalk." In *Frank O'Hara: To Be True to a City*, edited by Jim Elledge, 64–69. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990.

Calloway, Cab. *The New Cab Calloway's Cat-ologue.* New York: Calloway, 1938.

———. *The New Cab Calloway's Hepster's Dictionary: Language of Jive*. New York: Calloway, 1944.

Chauncey, George. *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940*. New York: Basic Books, 1994.

Chessman, Harriet Scott. *The Public Is Invited to Dance: Representation, the Body, and Dialogue in Gertrude Stein.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989.

Chinitz, David E. *Which Sin to Bear? Authenticity and Compromise in Langston Hughes.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Colby, Elbridge. *The Echo Device in Literature*. New York: New York Public Library, 1920.

Collins, Louise. "Gossip: A Feminist Defense." In *Good Gossip*, edited by Robert F. Goodman and Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, 106–116.

Connor, Steven. "Satan and Sybil: Talk, Possession, and Dissociation." In *Talk Talk Talk: The Cultural Life of Everyday Conversation*, edited by S. I. Salamensky, 163–180. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Cooper, Dennis. Review of *Maxfield Parrish*, by Eileen Myles. *Artforum* (Summer 1996): 26.

Corber, Robert J. *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity.* Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.

Coviello, Peter. "Apocalypse from Now On." In *Queer Frontiers: Millennial Geographies, Genders, and Generations*, edited by Joseph Boone, Martin Dupuis, Martin Meeker, Karin Quimby, Cindy Sarver, Debra Silverman, and Rosemary Weatherston, 39–63. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000.

Coward, Noël. *The Lyrics of Noël Coward.* London: Bloomsbury, 2002.

Cowley, Malcolm. "The Last of the Lyric Poets." *New Republic*, January 27, 1932: 299–300.

Crimp, Douglas. "Right On, Girlfriend!" In *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and*

Social Theory, edited by Michael Warner, 300–320. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Culler, Jonathan. "Apostrophe." In *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*, 135–154. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981.

———. *Theory of the Lyric.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015.

Curnutt, Kirk, ed. *The Critical Response to Gertrude Stein*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2000.

Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

———. "The Queer Art of the Counterarchive." In *Cruising the Archive: Queer Art and Culture in Los Angeles, 1945–1980*, edited by David Frantz and Mia Locks, 32–35. Los Angeles: ONE National Lesbian and Gay Archives, 2011.

Dace, Tish, ed. *Langston Hughes: The Contemporary Reviews*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Davidson, Michael. *Guys Like Us: Citing Masculinity in Cold War Poetics.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

———. *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-century.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Davies, Catherine. *Whitman's Queer Children: America's Homosexual Epics.* New York: Bloomsbury, 2012.

Davis, Frank Marshall. "Book Review." In *Langston Hughes: The Contemporary Reviews*, edited by Tish Dace, 384–385.

Dean, Tim. "T. S. Eliot, Famous Clairvoyante." In *Gender, Desire, and Sexuality in T. S. Eliot*, edited by Cassandra Laity and Nancy K. Gish, 43–65. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

De Jongh, James. "The Poet Speaks of Places: A Close Reading of Langston Hughes's Literary Use of Place." In *A Historical Guide to Langston Hughes*, edited by Steven C. Tracy, 65–84. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

DeKoven, Marianne. *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein's Experimental Writing.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983.

D'Emilio, John. *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940–1970.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Derlega, Valerian J., and Alan L. Chaikin. "Privacy and Self-Disclosure in Social Relationships." *Journal of Social Issues* 33 (1977): 102–115.

Dewey, Anne Day. "The Modern American Long Poem." In *The Cambridge Companion to Modern American Poetry*, edited by Walter Kalaidjian, 65–88. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Dewey, Anne, and Libbie Rifkin, eds. *Among Friends: Engendering the Social Site of Poetry.* Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013.

Dickie, Margaret. "Recovering the Repression in Stein's Erotic Poetry." In *Gendered*

Modernisms: American Women Poets and Their Readers, edited by Margaret Dickie and Thomas J. Travisano, 3–25.

Dickie, Margaret, and Thomas J. Travisano, eds. *Gendered Modernisms: American Women Poets and Their Readers*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996.

Dickey, Frances. *The Modern Portrait Poem: From Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Ezra Pound*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012.

Diggory, Terrence. "Community 'Intimate' or 'Inoperative': New York School Poets and Politics from Paul Goodman to Jean-Luc Nancy." In *The Scene of My Selves: New Work on New York School Poets*, edited by Terrence Diggory and Stephen Paul Miller, 13–32. Orono: National Poetry Foundation, 2001.

Dlugos, Tim. *A Fast Life: The Collected Poems of Tim Dlugos*. Edited by David Trinidad. Callicoon, NY: Nightboat Books, 2011.

Donlon, Jocelyn Hazelwood. *Swinging in Place: Porch Life in Southern Culture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

Duhamel, Denise. *The Star Spangled Banner.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999.

Dunbar, Robin. "Gossip in Evolutionary Perspective." *Review of General Psychology* 8.2 (2004): 100–110.

Dunbar, R. I. M., A. Marriott, and N. D. C. Duncan. "Human Conversational Behavior." *Human Nature* 8 (1997): 231–246.

Dydo, Ulla E. "Gertrude Stein: Composition as Meditation." In *Gertrude Stein and the Making of Literature*, edited by Shirley Neuman and Ira B. Nadel, 42–60.

———. *Gertrude Stein: The Language That Rises, 1923–1934*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003.

———. "*Stanzas in Meditation*: The Other Autobiography." *Chicago Review* 35.2 (1985): 4–20.

Dydo, Ulla E., Rosalind Moad, and William Rice. "A Note on the Texts." In Gertrude Stein, *A Stein Reader*, edited by Ulla E. Dydo, 11–16.

Eckert, Penelope. "Cooperative Competition in Adolescent 'Girl Talk.'" *Discourse Processes* 13 (1990): 91–122.

Edelman, Lee. "Tearooms and Sympathy; or, The Epistemology of the Water Closet." In *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory*, 148–172. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Édouard Glissant: One World in Relation. Directed by Manthia Diawara. New York: Third World Newsreel, 2009.

Eliot, T. S. *The Three Voices of Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954.

———. *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*. Edited by Valerie Eliot. New York: Harcourt, 1971.

Emler, Nicholas. "Gossip, Reputation, Adaptation." In *Good Gossip*, edited by Robert F. Goodman and Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, 117–138.

Epstein, Andrew. *Beautiful Enemies: Friendship and Postwar American Poetry.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Equi, Elaine. "The Dirty Poems of Frank O'Hara." *Crossroads* (Spring 2000): 5–6.

Feldman, Alan. *Frank O'Hara*. Boston: Twayne, 1979.

Ferguson, Roderick A. *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

Fifer, Elizabeth. "Guardians and Witnesses: Narrative Technique in Gertrude Stein's *Useful Knowledge*." *Journal of Narrative Technique* 10 (1980): 115–127.

———. "Is Flesh Advisable? The Interior Theater of Gertrude Stein." *Signs* 4.3 (1979): 472–483.

Firchow, Peter Edgerly. *W. H. Auden: Contexts for Poetry*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002.

Fischer, Claude S. *America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

Ford, Mark. Introduction to *Selected Poems*, by Frank O'Hara, edited by Mark Ford, xi–xvii. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008.

Foster, Eric K. "Research on Gossip: Taxonomy, Methods, and Future Directions." *Review of General Psychology* 8.2 (2004): 78–99.

Foucault, Michel. "Friendship as a Way of Life." Translated by John Johnston. In *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1961–1984)*, edited by Sylvère Lotringer, 308–312. New York: Semiotext(e), 1989.

———. *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1990.

Fox, Kate. "Evolution, Alienation and Gossip." *Social Issues Research Centre*. 2001. http://www.sirc.org/publik/gossip.shtml.

Frank, Johanna. "Resonating Bodies and the Poetics of Aurality; Or, Gertrude Stein's Theatre." *Modern Drama* 51.4 (2008): 501–527.

Frost, Robert. *Interviews with Robert Frost*. Edited by Edward Connery Lathem. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966.

———. *The Poetry of Robert Frost*. Edited by Edward Connery Lathem. New York: Henry Holt, 1979.

———. *Robert Frost: A Living Voice*. Edited by Reginald Cook. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1974.

———. *Selected Letters of Robert Frost*. Edited by Lawrance Thompson. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Wilson, 1964.

Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.

García-Montes, José M., Domingo Caballero-Muñoz, and Marino Pérez-Álvarez. "Changes in the Self Resulting from the Use of Mobile Phones." *Media, Culture and Society* 28.1 (2006): 67–82.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. "The Black Man's Burden." In *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Social Theory*, edited by Michael Warner, 230–38. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

———. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980.

George, Daniel. *Alphabetical Order: A Gallimaufry*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1949.

Gery, John. *Nuclear Annihilation and Contemporary American Poetry: Ways of Nothingness*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996.

Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected Poems 1947–1997.* New York: Harper Perennial, 2006.

———. "Early Poetic Community (Kent State, April 7, 1971)." In *Allen Verbatim: Lectures on Poetry, Politics, Consciousness*, edited by Gordon Ball, 131–150. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974.

Glass, Loren. *Authors Inc.: Literary Celebrity in The Modern United States, 1880–1980*. New York: New York University Press, 2004.

Glavey, Brian. *The Wallflower Avant-Garde*: *Modernism, Sexuality, and Queer Ekphrasis*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Glissant, Édouard. *Poetics of Relation*. Translated by Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.

Gluckman, Max. "Gossip and Scandal." *Current Anthropology* 4 (1963): 307–316.

Goffman, Erving. *Forms of Talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981.

Goldman, Jonathan. *Modernism Is the Literature of Celebrity*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011.

Gooch, Brad. *City Poet: The Life and Times of Frank O'Hara*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.

Goodman, Robert F. Introduction to *Good Gossip*, edited by Robert F. Goodman and Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, 1–8.

Goodman, Robert F., and Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, eds. *Good Gossip*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994.

Green, Jonathon. *Cassell's Dictionary of Slang*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1998.

Griffin, Farah Jasmine. *"Who Set You Flowin'?" The African-American Migration Narrative*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Grossman, Allen, with Mark Halliday. *The Sighted Singer: Two Works on Poetry for Readers and Writers*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.

Gunn, Thom. *Boss Cupid*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000.

———. "A Heroic Enterprise." In *A Reader's Guide to James Merrill's "The Changing Light at Sandover,"* edited by Robert Polito, 153–157.

Gwiazda, Piotr K. *James Merrill and W. H. Auden: Homosexuality and Poetic Influence*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Gygax, Franziska. *Gender and Genre in Gertrude Stein*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998.

Halpern, Nick. *Everyday and Prophetic: The Poetry of Lowell, Ammons, Merrill, and Rich*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003.

Hammer, Langdon. "Frank Bidart and the Tone of Contemporary Poetry." In *On Frank Bidart: Fastening the Voice to the Page*, edited by Liam Rector and Tree Swenson, 7–21. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007.

———. *James Merrill: Life and Art*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015.

Hannerz, Ulf. "Gossip Networks and Culture in a Black American Ghetto." *Ethnos* 32 (1967): 35–60.

Harris, Reginald. "John Keene: On Hidden Histories and Why Writing against Official Narratives Is Queer." *Lambda Literary*. June 3, 2015. http://www.lambdaliterary.org/interviews/06/03/john-keene-on-hidden-histories-and-why-writing-against-official-narratives-is-queer/.

Hartman, Saidiya V. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Hayles, N. Katherine. "Voices Out of Bodies, Bodies Out of Voices: Audiotape and the Production of Subjectivity." In *Sound States: Innovative Poetics*, edited by Adalaide Morris, 74–96. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010.

Hejinian, Lyn. *The Language of Inquiry*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

Henzy, Karl. "Langston Hughes's Poetry and the Metaphysics of Simplicity." *Callaloo* 34.3 (2011): 915–927.

Herbert, George. "Heaven." In *The Complete English Poems*, edited by John Tobin, 172. New York: Penguin, 2004.

Herring, Terrell Scott. "Frank O'Hara's Open Closet." *PMLA* 117.3 (2002): 414–427.

Hillebrandt, Claudia, Sonja Klimek, Ralph Müller, William Waters, and Rüdiger Zymner, eds. *Theories of the Lyric*. Spec. issue of *Journal of Literary Theory* 11.1 (2017).

Hokanson, Robert O'Brien. "Jazzing It Up: The Be-Bop Modernism of Langston Hughes." *Mosaic* 31.4 (1998): 61–82.

Holbrook, Susan. "Lifting Bellies, Filling Petunias, and Making Meanings through the Trans-Poetic." *American Literature* 71.4 (December 1999): 751–771.

Hollander, John. *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.

Hollenbach, Lisa. "Sono-Montage: Langston Hughes and Tony Schwartz Listen to Postwar New York." *American Literature* 87.2 (2015): 275–302.

Holmes, Kwame. "What's the Tea: Gossip and the Production of Black Gay Social History." *Radical History Review* 122 (2015): 55–69.

hooks, bell. "Seductive Sexualities: Representing Blackness in Poetry and on Screen."

In *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, 193-202. Boston: South End Press, 1990.

Hricko, Mary. *The Genesis of the Chicago Renaissance: Theodore Dreiser, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and James T. Farrell*. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Hughes, Langston. *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz*. In *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, vol. 3, *The Poems: 1951-1967*, edited by Arnold Rampersad, 79-126. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001.

———. *The Big Sea: An Autobiography*. In *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, vol. 13, *Autobiography: The Big Sea*, edited by Joseph McLaren, 19-256. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002.

———. "Blessed Assurance." In *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, vol. 15, *The Short Stories*, edited by R. Baxter Miller, 374-378. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002.

———. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. Edited by Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel. New York: Vintage, 1995.

———. "Dear Old Southland." In *Langston Hughes and the Chicago Defender: Essays on Race, Politics, and Culture, 1942-62*, edited by Christopher C. De Santis, 82-84. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995.

———. *The First Book of Jazz*. In *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, vol. 11, *Works for Children and Young Adults: Poetry, Fiction, and Other Writing*, edited by Dianne Johnson, 277-322. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003.

———. Foreword to *Poems from Black Africa*. In *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, vol. 9, *Essays on Art, Race, Politics, and World Affairs*, edited by Christopher C. De Santis, 507-511. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002.

———. "Jitney." In *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, vol. 2, *The Poems: 1941-1950*, edited by Arnold Rampersad, 216-218. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001.

———. *Langston Hughes Reader*. New York: George Braziller, 1958.

———. *Montage of a Dream Deferred*. In *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, vol. 3, *The Poems: 1951-1967*, edited by Arnold Rampersad, 15-77. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001.

———. "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." In *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, vol. 9, *Essays on Art, Race, Politics, and World Affairs*, edited by Christopher C. De Santis, 31-36. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002.

———. *Not without Laughter*. In *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, vol. 4, *The Novels*, edited by Dolan Hubbard, 13-209. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002.

———. *The Organizer: A Blues Opera in One Act*. In *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, vol. 6, *Gospel Plays, Operas, and Later Dramatic Works*, edited by Leslie Catherine Sanders, 52-66. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004.

———. *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes*. New York: Knopf, 1959.

———. "Seven People Dancing." *New Yorker*, June 6 and 13, 2016: 60–61.

———. *Simple Takes a Wife*. In *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, vol. 7, *The Early Simple Stories*, edited by Donna Akiba Sullivan Harper, 171–379. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002.

Hughes, Langston, and Arna Bontemps. *Tropics after Dark*. In *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, vol. 6, *Gospel Plays, Operas, and Later Dramatic Works*, edited by Leslie Catherine Sanders, 159–178. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004.

———. *When the Jack Hollers*. *Or Careless Love: A Negro-Folk Comedy in Three Acts*. In *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, vol. 5, *The Plays to 1942: "Mulatto" to "The Sun Do Move,"* edited by Leslie Catherine Sanders with Nancy Johnston, 33–406. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002.

Hughes, Ted. *Birthday Letters*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. 1937. Reprint, New York: Harper Perennial, 2000.

Huyssen, Andreas. "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other." In *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, 44–62. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

"Interview with a Poet." *South Florida Poetry Journal.* May 2016. http://www.southfloridapoetryjournal.com/interviews.html.

Izenberg, Oren. *Being Numerous: Poetry and the Ground of Social Life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Jackson, David. "DJ: A Conversation with David Jackson." Edited by J. D. McClatchy. *Shenandoah* 30.4 (1979): 23–44.

Jackson, Virginia. *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

———. "Lyric." In *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed., edited by Roland Greene, Stephen Cushman, Clare Cavanagh, Jahan Ramazani, and Paul Rouzer, 826–834. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.

———. "Response: What Is the Place of Lyric in Modern and Contemporary Poetry?" *Jacket 2*. April 2015. http://jacket2.org/commentary/what-place-lyric-modern-and-contemporary-poetry.

Jackson, Virginia, and Yopie Prins, eds. *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014.

Jarraway, David. *Going the Distance: Dissident Subjectivity in Modernist American Literature*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003.

Jaworski, Adam, and Justine Coupland. "Othering in Gossip: 'You Go out You Have a Laugh and You Can Pull Yeah Okay but like . . . ,'" *Language in Society* 34 (2005): 667–694.

Jemie, Onwuchekwa. *Langston Hughes: An Introduction to the Poetry*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1967.

Johnson, Barbara. *Persons and Things*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Johnston, Devin. *Precipitations: Contemporary American Poetry as Occult Practice*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002.

Jones, Meta DuEwa. *The Muse Is Music: Jazz Poetry from the Harlem Renaissance to Spoken Word*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011.

Kahan, Benjamin. *Celibacies: American Modernism and Sexual Life*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.

Kalstone, David. "Persisting Figures: The Poet's Story and How We Read It." In *James Merrill: Essays in Criticism*, edited by David Lehman and Charles Berger, 125–144. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.

Kane, Daniel. *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

Katz, James Everett. *Connections: Social and Cultural Studies of the Telephone in American Life*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1999.

———. "Mobile Communications and the Transformation of Daily Life: The Next Phase of Research on Mobiles." *Knowledge, Technology, and Policy* 19.1 (2006): 62–71.

Katz, Jonathan. "Identification." In *Difference/Indifference: Musings on Postmodernism, Marcel Duchamp and John Cage*, edited by Moira Roth, 49–70. Amsterdam: GB Arts International, 1998.

Katz, Jonathan, ed. *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1976.

Keats, John. "Ode to a Nightingale." In *Complete Poems and Selected Letters of John Keats*, 236–238. New York: Modern Library, 2001.

Keene, John. *Counternarratives*. New York: New Directions, 2015.

Keller, Lynn. "'Post-Language Lyric': The Example of Juliana Spahr." *Chicago Review* 55.3–4 (2010): 74–83.

Kent, Kathryn R. *Making Girls into Women: American Women's Writing and the Rise of Lesbian Identity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

Kerr, Heather, and Claire Walker, eds. *Fama and Her Sisters: Gossip and Rumour in Early Modern Europe*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2015.

Kierkegaard, Søren. *The Present Age*. Translated by Alexander Dru. New York: Harper Perennial, 2010.

Koch, Kenneth. "A Note on Frank O'Hara in the Early Fifties." In *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, edited by Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur, 26–27.

Koestenbaum, Wayne. *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration*. New York: Routledge, 1989.

———. *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.

———. "Stein Is Nice." In *Cleavage: Essays on Sex, Stars, and Aesthetics*, 309–333. New York: Ballantine Books, 2000.

Krock, Arthur. "The Jenkins Case." *New York Times*, October 18, 1964.

Landers, Ann. "Idle Gossip Can Be Deadly." Dear Ann Landers, *Daily News* (Bowling Green, KY), August 22, 1985.

Legman, Gershon. "The Language of Homosexuality." In *Gay/Lesbian Almanac: A New Documentary*, edited by Jonathan Ned Katz, 571–584. New York: Harper and Row, 1983.

Lehman, David. "Elemental Bravery: The Unity of James Merrill's Poetry." In *James Merrill: Essays in Criticism*, edited by David Lehman and Charles Berger, 23–60. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.

Leick, Karen. *Gertrude Stein and the Making of an American Celebrity*. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Lempert, Benjamin R. "Hughes/Olson: Whose Music? Whose Era?" *American Literature* 87.2 (2015): 303–330.

LeSueur, Joe. "Four Apartments." In *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, edited by Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur, 46–49.

Lewis, Wyndham. "Preliminary Aside to the Reader; Regarding Gossip, and Its Pitfalls." Edited by Thomas R. Smith. *Modernism/Modernity* 4.2 (1997): 181–187.

Lochrie, Karma. *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.

Loeffelholz, Mary. "History as Conjugation: Stein's *Stanzas in Meditation* and the Literary History of the Modernist Long Poem." In *Gendered Modernisms: American Women Poets and Their Readers*, edited by Margaret Dickie and Thomas J. Travisano, 26–42.

Looking for Langston. Directed by Isaac Julien. UK: Sankofa Film and Video, 1988.

Love, Heather. *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Lowell, Robert. *Collected Poems*. Edited by Frank Bidart and David Gewanter. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003.

Lowney, John. "Langston Hughes and the 'Nonsense' of Bebop." *American Literature* 72.2 (2000): 357–385.

Luciano, Dana, and Mel Y. Chen. "Has the Queer Ever Been Human?" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21.2–3 (2015): 182–207.

Lurie, Alison. *Familiar Spirits: A Memoir of James Merrill and David Jackson*. New York: Viking, 2001.

Major, Clarence. *Juba to Jive: A Dictionary of African-American Slang*. New York: Penguin, 1994.

Martin, Nicholas, ed. *Literature and Gossip*. Spec. issue of *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 50.2 (2014).

Masters, Edgar Lee. *Spoon River Anthology*. 1915. Reprint, New York: Penguin, 2008.

Materer, Timothy. *James Merrill's Apocalypse.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000.

———. *Modernist Alchemy: Poetry and the Occult*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.

May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. New York: Basic Books, 1988.

Mayer, Bernadette. *Scarlet Tanager*. New York: New Directions, 2005.

Mazzocco, Robert. "The Right Stuff." In *A Reader's Guide to James Merrill's "The Changing Light at Sandover,"* edited by Robert Polito, 208–221.

McHale, Brian. *The Obligation toward the Difficult Whole: Postmodernist Long Poems*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004.

Mercer, Kobena. *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Merrill, James. "Acoustical Chambers." In *Collected Prose*, edited by J. D. McClatchy and Stephen Yenser, 3–8.

———. *The Changing Light at Sandover*. Edited by J. D. McClatchy and Stephen Yenser. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.

———. "*The Changing Light at Sandover*: A Conversation with James Merrill." Edited by Robert Polito. *Pequod* 31 (1990): 10–13.

———. *Collected Poems*. Edited by J. D. McClatchy and Stephen Yenser. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002.

———. *Collected Prose*. Edited by J. D. McClatchy and Stephen Yenser. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004.

———. *A Different Person: A Memoir*. In *Collected Prose*, edited by J. D. McClatchy and Stephen Yenser, 457–684.

———. "The Education of the Poet." In *Collected Prose*, edited by J. D. McClatchy and Stephen Yenser, 9–18.

———. "An Interview with Donald Sheehan." In *Collected Prose*, edited by J. D. McClatchy and Stephen Yenser, 49–61.

———. "An Interview with Fred Bornhauser." In *Collected Prose*, edited by J. D. McClatchy and Stephen Yenser, 135–143.

———. "An Interview with Helen Vendler." In *Collected Prose*, edited by J. D. McClatchy and Stephen Yenser, 85–89.

———. "An Interview with J. D. McClatchy." In *Collected Prose*, edited by J. D. McClatchy and Stephen Yenser, 103–125.

———. "An Interview with Thomas Bolt." In *Collected Prose*, edited by J. D. McClatchy and Stephen Yenser, 151–161.

———. James Merrill Papers, Washington University Libraries, Department of Special Collections.

———. "The Poet's Notebook." In *Collected Prose*, edited by J. D. McClatchy and Stephen Yenser, 32–39.

———. *The Seraglio*. In *Collected Novels and Plays*, edited by J. D. McClatchy and Stephen Yenser, 3–304. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002.

———. *Voices from Sandover*. Princeton: Films for the Humanities, 1990.

Merrill, James, and David Jackson. "The Plato Club." *Paris Review* 34.122 (1992): 14–84.

Mill, John Stuart. "Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties." In *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 1, *Autobiography and Literary Essays*, edited by John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger, 341–365. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981.

Miller, William Ian. *The Anatomy of Disgust*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Mitchell, J. J. "The Death of Frank O'Hara." In *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, edited by Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur, 144–146.

Mix, Deborah M. "Gertrude Stein's Currency." In *Modernist Star Maps: Celebrity, Modernity, Culture*, edited by Aaron Jaffe and Jonathan Goldman, 93–104. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010.

Moffett, Judith. *James Merrill: An Introduction to the Poetry*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.

Molesworth, Charles. "Scripts for the Pageant." In *A Reader's Guide to James Merrill's "The Changing Light at Sandover,"* edited by Robert Polito, 173–177.

Morreall, John. "Gossip and Humor." In *Good Gossip*, edited by Robert F. Goodman and Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, 56–64.

Moten, Fred. *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

———. "Words Don't Go There: An Interview with Fred Moten." By Charles Rowell. In *B Jenkins*, 97–112. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Moynihan, Daniel Patrick. *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1965.

Mullen, Harryette. *Sleeping with the Dictionary*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press, 2009.

———. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

———. "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts." *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 8.2 (1996): 5–16.

Myers, John Bernard. Introduction to *The Poets of the New York School*, edited by John Bernard Myers, 7–29. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1969.

Myles, Eileen. "How to Write an Avant-Garde Poem." In *The Importance of Being Iceland: Travel Essays in Art*, 153–162. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009.

———. *I Must Be Living Twice: New and Selected Poems, 1975–2014*. New York: Ecco, 2015.

———. *Inferno (A Poet's Novel)*. New York: OR Books, 2010.

———. Interview with Edward Foster. In *Poetry and Poetics in a New Millennium*, edited by Edward Foster, 50–63. New Jersey: Talisman Press, 2000.

———. "Interview with Eileen Myles by Kimberly Lamm." *How2* 1.8 (2002). https://www.asu.edu/pipercwcenter/how2journal/archive/online_archive/v1_8_2002/current/workbook/lamm-interview.htm.

———. "Poetics Statement." In *Eleven More American Women Poets in the 21st Century*, edited by Claudia Rankine and Lisa Sewell, 241–242. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2012.

———. *Snowflake*. Seattle and New York: Wave Books, 2012.

———. "Tim: A Review." *Mississippi Review* 31.3 (2003): 226–231.

"Negro Poet Sings of Life in Big Cities." In *Langston Hughes: The Contemporary Reviews*, edited by Tish Dace, 89.

Nelson, Deborah. *Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.

Nelson, Maggie. *Women, the New York School, and Other True Abstractions*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007.

Nero, Charles I. "Re/Membering Langston: Homophobic Textuality and Arnold Rampersad's *Life of Langston Hughes*." In *Queer Representations: Reading Lives, Reading Cultures*, edited by Martin Duberman, 188–196. New York: New York University Press, 1997.

Neuman, Shirley, and Ira B. Nadel, eds. *Gertrude Stein and the Making of Literature*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988.

"The New Lyric Studies." *PMLA* 123.1 (January 2008): 181–234.

Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.

Nichols, Charles H., ed. *Arna Bontemps–Langston Hughes Letters, 1925–1967*. New York: Paragon House, 1990.

Noon, Mike, and Rick Delbridge. "News from Behind My Hand: Gossip in Organizations." *Organization Studies* 14 (1993): 23–36.

Nowottny, Winifred. *The Language Poets Use*. London: Athlone Press, 1962.

O'Hara, Frank. *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*. Edited by Donald Allen. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

———. Donald Allen Collection of Frank O'Hara Letters, Archives and Special Collections, University of Connecticut Library.

———. "Edward Lucie-Smith: An Interview with Frank O'Hara." In *Standing Still and Walking in New York*, edited by Donald Allen, 3–26. Bolinas: Grey Fox Press, 1975.

———. Grace Hartigan Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries.

———. *Lunch Poems*. San Francisco: City Lights, 1964.

———. *Poems Retrieved*. Edited by Donald Allen. San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1996.

O'Hara, Frank, and Norman Bluhm, Elaine de Kooning, Mike Goldberg, and Joan Mitchell. "5 Participants in a Hearsay Panel." In *Art Chronicles 1954–1966*, by Frank O'Hara, 149–156. New York: George Braziller, 1975.

O'Hara, Frank, and Larry Rivers. *Kenneth Koch, a Tragedy*. In *Amorous Nightmares of Delay: Selected Plays*, 121–132. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Translated by A. D. Melville. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Pack, Robert. Introduction to *New Poets of England and America*, edited by Donald Hall and Robert Pack, 177–183. 2nd Selection. New York: New American Library, 1962.

Park, Clara Claiborne. "Talking Back to the Speaker." *Hudson Review* 42.1 (1989): 21–44.

Parker, John W. "Poetry of Harlem in Transition." In *Langston Hughes: The Contemporary Reviews*, edited by Tish Dace, 388–390.

Parker, Patricia. Introduction to *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*, edited by Chaviva Hošek and Patricia Parker, 11–28. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Parker, Ruth Lerrigo. "Book Reviews." In *Langston Hughes: The Contemporary Reviews*, edited by Tish Dace, 399–400.

Parsons, Nicola. *Reading Gossip in Early Eighteenth-Century England*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Perloff, Marjorie. "'The Ecstasy of Always Bursting Forth!' Rereading Frank O'Hara." *Lana Turner: A Journal of Poetry & Opinion* 1 (Fall 2008): 163–173.

———. *Frank O'Hara: Poet among Painters*. 1977. Reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

———. "(Im)Personating Gertrude Stein." In *Gertrude Stein and the Making of Literature*, edited by Shirley Neuman and Ira B. Nadel, 61–80.

———. *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Pettingell, Phoebe. "Voices from the Atom." In *A Reader's Guide to James Merrill's "The Changing Light at Sandover,"* edited by Robert Polito, 158–161.

Phillips, Susan E. *Transforming Talk: The Problem with Gossip in Late Medieval England*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007.

Pióro, Tadeusz. "'A Certain Kneeness': The Boring and the New in Frank O'Hara's Poetry." In *Frank O'Hara Now: New Essays on the New York Poet*, edited by Robert Hampson and Will Montgomery, 86–99. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010.

Plath, Sylvia. *The Collected Poems of Sylvia Plath*. Edited by Ted Hughes. New York: Harper Perennial, 1981.

Plato. *Symposium*. Translated by Christopher Gill. New York: Penguin, 1999.

Polito, Robert, ed. *A Reader's Guide to James Merrill's "The Changing Light at Sandover."* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994.

Ponce, Martin Joseph. "Langston Hughes's Queer Blues." *Modern Language Quarterly* 66 (2005): 505–537.

Pondrom, Cyrena. "An Introduction to the Achievement of Gertrude Stein." In *Geography and Plays*, by Gertrude Stein, vii–lv.

Porte, Rebecca Ariel. "Long Dull Poems: Stein's *Stanzas in Meditation* and Wordsworth's *The Prelude*." In *Primary Stein: Returning to the Writing of Gertrude Stein*, edited by Janet Boyd and Sharon J. Kirsch, 77–96. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014.

Porter, Fairfield. *Material Witness: The Selected Letters of Fairfield Porter*. Edited by Ted Leigh. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005.

Pound, Ezra. *ABC of Reading*. 1934. Reprint, New York: New Directions, 1960.

———. *Personae: The Shorter Poems of Ezra Pound*. 1926. Reprint, New York: New Directions, 1990.

Powell, D. A. "The Elegy's Structures." In *Structure and Surprise: Engaging Poetic Turns*, edited by Michael Theune, 83–94. New York: Teachers and Writers Collaborative, 2007.

———. *Repast: Tea, Lunch, Cocktails*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014.

———. "Turning the Paper Sideways: An Interview with D. A. Powell." By Sam Witt and Sean Durkin. *Poetry Flash* 284 (2000). www.poetryflash.org/archive/284Witt.html.

Preston, John Hyde. "A Conversation." *Atlantic Monthly* 56 (1935): 187–194.

Prins, Yopie. "'What Is Historical Poetics?'" *Modern Language Quarterly* 77.1 (March 2016): 13–40.

Puchner, Martin. *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-theatricality, and Drama*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.

Puttenham, George. *Arte of English Poesie*. Edited by Gladys Doidge Wilcock and Alice Walker. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936.

Ramazani, Jahan. "Lyric Poetry: Intergeneric, Transnational, Translingual?" *Journal of Literary Theory* 11.1 (2017): 97–107.

———. *Poetry and Its Others: News, Prayer, Song, and the Dialogue of Genres*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014.

Ramazani, Jahan, Richard Ellman, and Robert O'Clair, eds. *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*. 3rd ed., vol. 1. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003.

Rampersad, Arnold. *The Life of Langston Hughes*, vol. 1, *1902–1941, I, Too, Sing America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

———. *The Life of Langston Hughes*, vol. 2, *1941–1967, I Dream a World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

———. "The Origins of Poetry in Langston Hughes." *Southern Literary Review* 21.3 (1985): 695–705.

Rampersad, Arnold, and David Roessel. Introduction to *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, edited by Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel, 3–7. New York: Vintage, 1995.

Reddy, Srikanth. *Changing Subjects: Digressions in Modern American Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Reed, Anthony. *Freedom Time: The Poetics and Politics of Black Experimental Writing*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014.

Reed, Brian M. "In Other Words: Postmillennial Poetry and Redirected Language." *Contemporary Literature* 52.4 (2011): 756–790.

Reid, B. L. *Art by Subtraction: A Dissenting Opinion of Gertrude Stein*. Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1958.

Reimonenq, Alden. "Hughes, Langston (1902–1967)." In *The Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage*, edited by Claude J. Summers, 349–350. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Retallack, Joan. "On Not Not Reading *Stanzas in Meditation*: Pressures and Pleasures of the Text." In *Stanzas in Meditation: The Corrected Edition*, by Gertrude Stein, 1–27.

Reumann, Miriam G. *American Sexual Character: Sex, Gender, and National Identity in the Kinsey Reports*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

Rhetorica ad Herennium. Edited and translated by Harry Caplan. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954.

Rich, B. Ruby. "The Party Line: Gender and Technology in the Home." In *Processed Lives: Gender and Technology in Everyday Life*, edited by Melodie Calvert and Jennifer Terry, 221–232. London: Routledge, 1997.

Richards, I. A. *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1929.

Richardson, John. "Picasso and Gertrude Stein: Mano a Mano, Tete-a-Tete." *New York Times*, February 10, 1991.

Rieke, Alison. *The Senses of Nonsense*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992.

Rifkin, Libbie. *Career Moves: Olson, Creeley, Zukofsky, Berrigan, and the American Avant-Garde*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000.

Rivers, Larry. "Life among the Stones." In *Art in America 1945–1970: Writings from the Age of Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, and Minimalism*, edited by Jed Perl, 492–501. New York: Library of America, 2014.

Rogoff, Irit. "Gossip as Testimony: A Post-modern Signature." In *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts*, edited by Griselda Pollock, 75–85. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Rohy, Valerie. "On Homosexual Reproduction." *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 23.1 (2012): 101–130.

Rosenbaum, Susan B. *Professing Sincerity: Modern Lyric Poetry, Commercial Culture, and the Crisis in Reading*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007.

Rosnow, Ralph L. "Gossip and Marketplace Psychology." *Journal of Communication* 27 (1977): 158–163.

———. "Rumor and Gossip in Interpersonal Interaction and Beyond: A Social Exchange Perspective." In *Behaving Badly: Aversive Behaviors in Interpersonal Relationships*, edited by Robin M. Kowalski, 203–232. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001.

Rosnow, Ralph L., and Gary Alan Fine. *Rumor and Gossip: The Social Psychology of Hearsay*. New York: Elsevier, 1976.

Salvato, Nick, ed. *Gossip*. Spec. issue of *Modern Drama* 53.3 (2010).

Sastri, Reena. *James Merrill: Knowing Innocence*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

Schantz, Ned. *Gossip, Letters, Phones: The Scandal of Female Networks in Film and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Schjeldahl, Peter. "Frank O'Hara: 'He Made Things & People Sacred.'" In *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, edited by Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur, 139–143.

Schmitz, Neil. "The Difference of Her Likeness: Gertrude Stein's *Stanzas in Meditation*." In *Gertrude Stein and the Making of Literature*, edited by Shirley Neuman and Ira B. Nadel, 124–149.

Schoeman, Ferdinand. "Gossip and Privacy." In *Good Gossip*, edited by Robert F. Goodman and Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, 72–82.

Schultz, Kathy Lou. *Afro-Modernist Epic and Literary History: Tolson, Hughes, Baraka*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Schuyler, James. *Collected Poems*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995.

———. "Frank O'Hara: Poet among Painters." In *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, edited by Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur, 80–83.

Schwarz, A. B. Christa. *Gay Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *The Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

———. "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is about You." In *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, 123–151. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

See, Sam. "'Spectacles in Color': The Primitive Drag of Langston Hughes." *PMLA* 124.3 (2009): 798–816.

Setina, Emily. "From 'Impossible' Writing to a Poetics of Intimacy: John Ashbery's Reading of Gertrude Stein." *Genre* 45.1 (2012): 143–166.

Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. Edited by Stephen Orgel. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

———. *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*. Edited by Roger Warren and Stanley Wells. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Shaw, Lytle. *Fieldworks: From Place to Site in Postwar Poetics*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013.

———. *Frank O'Hara: The Poetics of Coterie*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe. "A Defence of Poetry." In *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, edited by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 509–535. New York: W. W. Norton, 2002.

———. "To a Sky-Lark." In *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, edited by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 304–307. New York: W. W. Norton, 2002.

Sherry, Michael S. *Gay Artists in Modern American Culture: An Imagined Conspiracy*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

Shetley, Vernon. *After the Death of Poetry: Poet and Audience in Contemporary America*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.

Shoptaw, John. "James Merrill and John Ashbery." In *The Columbia History of American Poetry*, edited by Jay Parini and Brett C. Millier, 750–776. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

———. "Lyric Incorporated: The Serial Object of George Oppen and Langston Hughes." *Sagetrieb* 12 (1993): 105–124.

———. *On the Outside Looking Out: John Ashbery's Poetry*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.

Silverberg, Mark. *The New York School Poets and the Neo-Avant-Garde: Between Radical Art and Radical Chic*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2010.

Smethurst, James. *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

———. *The New Red Negro: The Literary Left and African American Poetry, 1930–1946*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Smith, Barbara Herrnstein. *On the Margins of Discourse: The Relations of Literature to Language*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976.

Smith, David Nowell. *On Voice in Poetry: The Work of Animation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Smith, Hazel. *Hyperscapes in the Poetry of Frank O'Hara: Difference/Homosexuality/Topography*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000.

Solove, Daniel J. *The Future of Reputation: Gossip, Rumor, and Privacy on the Internet*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

Spacks, Patricia Meyer. *Gossip*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985.

Spahr, Juliana. *Everybody's Autonomy: Connective Reading and Collective Identity*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001.

———. *That Winter the Wolf Came*. Oakland: Commune Editions, 2015.

———. *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

———. *The Transformation*. Berkeley: Atelos, 2007.

Spahr, Juliana, and David Buuck. *An Army of Lovers*. San Francisco: City Lights, 2013.

Stein, Gertrude. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. 1933. Reprint, New York: Vintage, 1990.

———. *Baby Precious Always Shines*. Edited by Kay Turner. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.

———. *Bee Time Vine and Other Pieces (1913–1927)*, vol. 3 of *Yale Edition of the Unpublished Writings of Gertrude Stein*, edited by Carl Van Vechten. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953.

———. *The Geographical History of America, or The Relation of Human Nature to the Human Mind*. In *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1932-1946*, 365-488.

———. *Geography and Plays*. 1922. Reprint, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993.

———. The Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

———. *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1903-1932*. Edited by Catharine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman. New York: Library of America, 1998.

———. *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1932-1946*. Edited by Catharine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman. New York: Library of America, 1998.

———. "The Gradual Making of *The Making of Americans*." In *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1932-1946*, 270-286.

———. "If I Told Him: A Completed Portrait of Picasso." In *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1903-1932*, 506-508.

———. *Ladies' Voices*. In *A Stein Reader*, 306-307.

———. "Lifting Belly." In *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1903-1932*, 410-458.

———. "Plays." In *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1932-1946*, 244-269.

———. "Poetry and Grammar." In *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1932-1946*, 313-336.

———. *Q.E.D.* In *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1903-1932*, 1-63.

———. *Stanzas in Meditation and Other Poems, 1929-1933*, vol. 6 of *Yale Edition of the Unpublished Writings of Gertrude Stein*, edited by Carl Van Vechten. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956.

———. *Stanzas in Meditation: The Corrected Edition*. Edited by Susannah Hollister and Emily Setina. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.

———. *A Stein Reader*. Edited by Ulla E. Dydo. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993.

———. "What Are Master-Pieces and Why Are There So Few of Them." In *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1932-1946*, 353-363.

Stein, Gertrude, and Carl Van Vechten. *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, 1913-1946*, vol. 2. Edited by Edward Burns. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

Stewart, Susan. *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

Stimpson, Catharine. "Gertrude Stein and the Lesbian Lie." In *American Women's Autobiography: Fea(s)ts of Memory*, edited by Margo Culley, 152-166. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.

———. "The Mind, the Body and Gertrude Stein." *Critical Inquiry* 3.3 (1977): 489-506.

Stirling, Rebecca Birch. "Some Psychological Mechanisms Operative in Gossip." *Social Forces* 34 (1956): 262-267.

Sutherland, Donald. "Preface: The Turning Point." In *Stanzas in Meditation and Other Poems, 1929-1933*, by Gertrude Stein, v-xxiv.

Sword, Helen. *Ghostwriting Modernism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002.

Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

Taylor, Monique M. *Harlem: Between Heaven and Hell*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

Testimony against Gertrude Stein. *Transition Pamphlet no. 1*. The Hague: Servire Press, 1935.

Tidwell, John Edgar. "The Sounds of Silence: Langston Hughes as a 'Down Low' Brother?" In *Montage of a Dream*, edited by John Edgar Tidwell and Cheryl R. Ragar, 55-67.

Tidwell, John Edgar, and Cheryl R. Ragar. "Langston Hughes Revisited and Revised: An Introduction." In *Montage of a Dream: The Art and Life of Langston Hughes*, edited by John Edgar Tidwell and Cheryl R. Ragar, 1-31.

———, eds. *Montage of a Dream: The Art and Life of Langston Hughes*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007.

Tiffany, Daniel. *Infidel Poetics: Riddles, Nightlife, Substance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Tracy, Steven C. "Langston Hughes and Afro-American Vernacular Music." In *A Historical Guide to Langston Hughes*, edited by Steven C. Tracy, 85-118. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

———. *Langston Hughes and the Blues*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001.

Trotter, David. *The Making of the Reader: Language and Subjectivity in Modern American, English and Irish Poetry*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984.

Troy, William. "A Note on Gertrude Stein." In *The Critical Response to Gertrude Stein*, edited by Kirk Curnutt, 66-68.

Tucker, Herbert F. "Dramatic Monologue and the Overhearing of Lyric." In *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*, edited by Chaviva Hošek and Patricia Parker, 226-243. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Turner, Daniel C. "Montage of a Simplicity Deferred: Langston Hughes's Art of Sophistication and Racial Intersubjectivity in *Montage of a Dream Deferred*." *Langston Hughes Review* 17 (2002): 22-34.

"Under the Lash of the Whip: A Column of Constructive Criticism of Men and Measures in the Hope of Correcting Errors and Evils." In *Langston Hughes: The Contemporary Reviews*, edited by Tish Dace, 100-102.

Unterecker, John. Foreword to *Langston Hughes: An Introduction to the Poetry*, by Onwuchekwa Jemie, ix-xi.

Van Buren, Abigail. "Gossip: Nobody's Friend." Dear Abby, *Sun Sentinel*, May 5, 1995.

———. "The Pain Gossip Causes Is Very Real." Dear Abby, *Bryan Times*, February 2, 1991.

Van Vechten, Carl. "Gertrude Stein: An Epilogue." In *The Critical Response to Gertrude Stein*, edited by Kirk Curnutt, 289-290.

———. "How to Read Gertrude Stein." In *The Critical Response to Gertrude Stein*, edited by Kirk Curnutt, 154–158.

———. "Medals for Miss Stein." In *The Critical Response to Gertrude Stein*, edited by Kirk Curnutt, 23–24.

Vendler, Helen. *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

———. *Part of Nature, Part of Us: Modern American Poets*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980.

Villaurrutia, Xavier. "North Carolina Blues." Translated by Grace Schulman. *Literature and Arts of the Americas* 10.17 (1976): 23.

Vogel, Shane. "Closing Time: Langston Hughes and the Queer Poetics of Harlem Nightlife." In *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret: Race, Sexuality, Performance*, 104–131. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Walter, Eugene. "Secret of a Southern Porch." *New Yorker*, June 22, 1998: 60, 63.

Wang, Dorothy. *Thinking Its Presence: Form, Race, and Subjectivity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013.

Ward, Geoff. *Statutes of Liberty: The New York School of Poets*. Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1993.

Warhol, Andy. *a, a novel*. 1968. Reprint, New York: Grove Press, 1998.

———. *THE Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)*. New York: Harcourt, 1977.

Warhol, Andy, and Pat Hackett. *POPism: the Warhol '60s*. New York: Harcourt, 1980.

Warner, Michael. *Publics and Counterpublics*. Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2002.

Warren, Samuel D., and Louis D. Brandeis. "The Right to Privacy." *Harvard Law Review* 4 (1890): 193–220.

Warren, Vincent. "Frank . . . ." In *Homage to Frank O'Hara*, edited by Bill Berkson and Joe LeSueur, 74–76.

Wasley, Aidan. *The Age of Auden: Postwar Poetry and the American Scene*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Waters, William. *Poetry's Touch: On Lyric Address*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003.

Watson, Dana Cairns. *Gertrude Stein and the Essence of What Happens*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005.

Weinstein, Norman. *Gertrude Stein and the Literature of Modern Consciousness*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1970.

West, Rebecca. "There Is No Conversation." In *The Harsh Voice: Four Short Novels*, 85–175. London: Jonathan Cape, 1935.

Wheeler, Lesley. *Voicing American Poetry: Sound and Performance from the 1920s to the Present*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008.

White, Edmund. *The Beautiful Room Is Empty*. New York: Vintage, 1988.

———. "The Inverted Type: Homosexuality as a Theme in James Merrill's Prophetic

Books." In *Essays on Gay Literature*, edited by Stuart Kellogg, 47–52. New York: Haworth, 1983.

White, Gillian. *Lyric Shame: The "Lyric" Subject of Contemporary American Poetry*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014.

White, Heather Cass. "How to Have a Conversation with Gertrude Stein: An Essay in Four Steps." *Connotations* 10.2–3 (2000/2001): 124–146.

Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*. Edited by Michael Moon. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002.

Wilde, Oscar. *Lady Windermere's Fan*. In *Collins Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, centenary ed., 420–464. Glasgow: Harper Collins, 1999.

———. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. 1890. Reprint, New York: Penguin, 2000.

Wilson, August. *Jitney*. New York: Theater Communications Group, 2007.

Wilson, Edmund. "Gertrude Stein Old and Young." In *The Shores of Light: A Literary Chronicle of the Twenties and Thirties*, 575–586. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Young, 1952.

Wolf, Reva. *Andy Warhol, Poetry, and Gossip in the 1960s*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Woods, Gregory. *Articulate Flesh: Male Homo-Eroticism and Modern Poetry*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.

———. "Gay Re-readings of the Harlem Renaissance Poets." In *Critical Essays: Gay and Lesbian Writers of Color*, edited by Emmanuel S. Nelson, 127–142. New York: Harrington Park-Haworth, 1993.

Wordsworth, William. "Personal Talk." In *The Major Works*, edited by Stephen Gill, 269–270. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.

———. Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. In *The Major Works*, edited by Stephen Gill, 595–615. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.

Yenser, Stephen. *The Consuming Myth: The Work of James Merrill*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987.

Yerkovich, Sally. "Gossip as a Way of Speaking." *Journal of Communications* 26 (1977): 192–196.

Zimmerman, Lee. "Against Apocalypse: Politics and James Merrill's *The Changing Light at Sandover*." *Contemporary Literature* 30.3 (1989): 370–386.

This page intentionally left blank

Index

Abelove, Henry, 19
Abrahams, Roger, 87, 118, 121–122
Abrams, M. H., 54
address, 16, 25–26, 36, 63–65, 166, 229, 230–231, 246. *See also* apostrophe
Adorno, Theodor, 259n68
AIDS, 173, 189, 242–243, 245
Aldan, Daisy, 274n22
Altieri, Charles, 133
apostrophe, 58, 63, 67, 155, 161, 261n110; in Hughes's "Jitney," 91–92; in Stein's *Stanzas in Meditation*, 63–68. *See also* address
archive, 38, 81, 82, 100, 149, 168, 186, 225, 228, 234. *See also* counter-archive
Arnold, Matthew, 233
Aronson, Sidney H., 271n123
Ashbery, John, 20–21, 75, 132, 141, 143–144, 256n17, 274n22; on Frank O'Hara, 141–142, 155; on *Stanzas in Meditation*, 256n17
—works by: "The Grapevine," 21, 253n58; "Wet Casements," 278n76; "Worsening Situation," 277–278n76
Atmore, Henry, 100
Auden, W. H., 168, 169, 280n1, 282n42; as depicted in *Sandover*, 169, 183–184, 185–186, 188, 192–193, 198–199, 201–202, 204, 211, 219–223, 242; "In Defence of Gossip," 205. See also *Changing Light at Sandover, The*
Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, The (Stein), 42–43, 53, 61, 153, 231, 232, 233, 258n56; gossip as aspect of, 26, 30, 31–33, 34, 41, 50, 55, 60, 69, 70–72, 73; as juxtaposed with *Stanzas in Meditation*, 32–33, 34, 55, 61; reviews of, 31–32

Baldwin, James, 97, 100, 268n65, 269n83
Barksdale, Richard, 87, 89
Barthes, Roland, 22–23, 43, 51, 62, 66, 77, 109n261
—works by: *Empire of Signs*, 52; *A Lover's Discourse*, 23, 59, 200; *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, 23, 59, 60. *See also* Neutral, the
Baudelaire, Charles, 146
Bay-Cheng, Sarah, 261n121
Bell, Pearl K., 127
Benson, E. F., 203; and *Sandover*, 285–286n93
Benveniste, Emile, 59
Ben-Ze'ev, Aaron, 157
Berkson, Bill, 151
Bernhardt, Sarah, 51
Berrigan, Ted: "Train Ride," 277n64
Berry, Faith, 81
Bewley, Marius, 200–201, 202
Blake, William, 176
Blanchfield, Brian, 235
Bluhm, Norman, 130
Bontemps, Arna, 266n44
Bookstaver, May, 255–256n10
Boone, Bruce, 150
Brady, Andrea, 163
Brainard, Joe, 136
Brandeis, Louis, 1
Braques, Georges, 31, 70
Breslin, James, 158, 160

Brewster, Scott, 93
Bridgman, Richard, 32, 33, 38–39, 40, 61
Brinnin, John Malcolm, 73
Bromfield, Louis, 31, 32
Brooks, Cleanth, 210
Brower, Reuben, 212, 213, 214, 216, 288n142
Brunner, Edward, 93, 107, 113, 269n87
Bunting, Daniel George: "Publicity," 180–181
Burley, Dan, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104–105, 106, 111
Burt, Steph, 244
Butt, Gavin, 144, 179–180
Buuck, David, 230

Cage, John, 206
Calloway, Cab, 103, 268–269n80
camp, 162, 163, 170, 192, 197, 201
Changing Light at Sandover, The (Merrill), 12, 13, 17, 28, 224, 242, 285n88; "acoustical chambers" in, 218–223; Auden's role in, 169, 183–184, 185–186, 188, 192–193, 198–199, 200, 201–202, 204, 211, 218, 219–223, 242; and burnt manuscript motif, 181–186; childlessness as theme in, 189–190, 194, 195–199, 216; Cold War fears as manifested in, 20, 188–196, 215, 283n51; critical reception of, 170, 201; Eliot's role in, 175–178, 181, 195, 214, 223; Ephraim's role in, 170, 174, 178, 181, 183, 186, 188, 191–192, 193–194, 211, 214; and friendship, 204–209; homosexuality in, 178–181, 185–196; David Jackson's role in, 195, 206, 209, 210, 212; lyric gossip in, 16, 17, 20, 28, 169–174, 179–180, 196–209; as lyric sequence, 174; Maria's role in, 198, 199, 201–202, 204, 208; Mirabell's role in, 176, 198–199, 200, 201, 211; Ouija as compositional tool for, 177, 194, 195, 203, 208, 210–211, 214, 223; Plato's role in, 190, 199, 200, 201, 202, 204; poetic tone in, 16, 209–218, 221–223; queer literary tradition in, 13, 169, 172, 178, 181, 245; and queer reproduction, 193–194, 196, 197–200, 204, 209, 216; relationship between poetry and scandal in, 174–182, 185–188; "Rosebrick Manor" speech in, 219–223; tension between privacy and publicity in, 173, 175–176, 180–182, 186–187. *See also* Ouija board
Chauncey, George, 148
Chen, Mel, 260n103
Chessman, Harriet Scott, 35, 256n19
Chinitz, David, 122
Cold War culture: the artist in, 20, 178–180; and homosexuality, 18, 20, 124, 143–145, 173, 178–180, 182–188, 192; and nuclear threat, 173, 188–191, 283n51; and *Sandover*, 188–196. *See also* Lavender Scare; McCarthy era
Colette, 171, 175
confessional poetry, 27, 129, 278n80; and gossip, 7, 157–158; O'Hara on, 157–158. *See also* Lowell, Robert
Congreve, William, 176
Connor, Steven, 159
conversation, 14–15, 35, 43, 128, 170, 201
Cooper, Dennis, 13, 238
Corso, Gregory, 153
counter-archive, 81, 82, 83, 100, 148, 235, 243–244, 264n18
Coupland, Justine, 108, 119, 128
Coviello, Peter, 189
Coward, Noël, 274n21
Cowley, Malcolm, 54
Cowley, Patrick, 245
Crimp, Douglas, 253–254n61
Culler, Jonathan, 17, 91, 128, 161, 261n110
Cunningham, Merce, 206
Cvetkovich, Ann, 82

Dante, 175, 176
Davidson, Michael, 154
Davies, Catherine, 189
Dean, Tim, 281n26
Dear Abby, 3–5
D'Emilio, John, 179, 182
de Jongh, James, 108–109
de Kooning, Elaine, 130, 153–154
detraction, 145, 148, 164. *See also* gossip
Dickie, Margaret, 262n129
dish, 145, 164. *See also* gossip
disidentification, 252n47
Dlugos, Tim: "Tonight," 13
docupoets, 228
Duhamel, Denise: "Sex with a Famous Poet," 12–13, 251n31

Duncan, Robert, 245
Dydo, Ulla E., 33, 34, 46–47, 49, 54, 255–256n10, 259n81

Echo, myth of, 111, 113
Edelman, Lee, 189, 193
elegy, 27, 127, 140, 243–244
Eliot, T. S.: as depicted in *Sandover*, 176–178, 181, 195, 214, 281n26; on the lyric, 54; *The Waste Land*, 5–6, 14, 176, 177, 178, 195, 250n13
Eliot, Valerie, 250n13
Ellington, Duke, 90
Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government (Senate report), 182
Epstein, Andrew, 142, 150
Equi, Elaine, 279n103
erasure poets, 228

Fame: as depicted by Ovid, 37–38, 43, 168–169, 225, 228; Stein as, 71, 72, 73–74. *See also* House of Fame
Farr, Florence, 9
Ferguson, Roderick, 83, 88, 123
Fischer, Claude, 117
Flarf poets, 228, 229
Ford, Mark, 132, 133
Foucault, Michel, 75, 205, 262n128
Frank, Johanna, 51
Frankenthaler, Helen, 141
Freilicher, Jane, 134
Frost, Robert, 2, 249n4; as depicted in *Sandover*, 216, 287–288n131; on gossip, 2, 217; on "sentence sounds," 212, 213, 216–218
—works by: "The Housekeeper," 7; *North of Boston*, 6–7; "A Servant to Servants," 6–7
Fry, Roger, 70
Frye, Northrop, 63, 159, 166, 175–176

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr., 87
Genet, Jean, 171
Genette, Gérard, 50, 95, 105, 118, 135, 137, 267n58
George, Stefan, 259n68
Gery, John, 188
Gillespie, Dizzy, 98, 101
Ginsberg, Allen, 126; "City Midnight Junk Strains," 11, 127, 238, 251n26; "A Supermarket in California," 275n46
Glavey, Brian, 277n75
Glissant, Édouard, 102
Gluckman, Max, 80, 131, 266n39
Goffman, Erving, 129, 158, 159, 160–161, 162–163, 164
Goldberg, Mike, 130, 152–153
Gooch, Brad, 276n58
Goodman, Robert F., 23
gossip: and address, 59, 67–68; afterlife of, 168–169, 173; as archive and archival practice, 38, 81, 83, 91, 119, 148, 149, 168, 243; definitions of, 10–11, 14–15, 131, 151, 154, 155, 157, 204; as denigrated by poetry, 3, 4, 5, 6–10; ethics of, 15, 23–24, 35, 65, 68; feminist revaluations of, 8; Robert Frost on, 216–218; gendered perceptions of, 8, 37–38, 69, 154, 160, 220; and listening, 36–43, 51–52; "little bird" of, 58, 234; and names/naming, 13, 33, 131, 134; as nonce taxonomy, 21, 22–23, 41–42, 146; and objectification, 15, 18, 23, 24, 35, 45, 58–59, 62–63, 66, 125, 150–154, 163, 201; and paralipsis, 12–13, 74–75, 81, 176, 251n28, 262n126; as performative, 21–22, 41, 246–247; personification of, 3–5; and porch culture, 87, 109, 117; and privacy, 19, 79–80, 87, 173; queer experience of, 18–24; as resource for disempowered, 12, 18, 19–20, 22, 90, 165; as resource for poets in 21st century, 228–229; scholarship on, 2, 8, 14, 249–250n6; and sex, 10, 11, 69, 76, 88; social function of, 89, 265–266n38; as a style, 35, 51, 83, 130–131; and technology, 1, 28, 38–40, 116–117, 228, 232–234, 238–242; and tone, 173–174, 210, 215–216, 217–218; as a transformative space, 52, 76, 224–228; versus conversation, 14–15, 35, 128, 170, 201; voice of, 14, 38–39, 43–44, 49–51, 106–119. *See also* detraction; dish; Fame; House of Fame; Hughes, Langston; lyric gossip; Merrill, James; O'Hara, Frank; poetic gossip; queer gossip; Stein, Gertrude

gossip, a (person), 37, 50, 52, 69, 111, 220; as godparent, 50, 197; Langston Hughes as, 119; Wyndham Lewis as, 68–70; Frank O'Hara as, 126–127, 145, 151, 277n66; as a personification, 3–5; Gertrude Stein as, 31, 68–78. *See also* Fame
Grossman, Allen, 90, 94
Gunn, Thom, 208; "Famous Friends," 11
Gwiazda, Piotr, 187, 197, 221

Halpern, Nick, 285n88
Hammer, Langdon, 173–174, 213–214
Hannerz, Ulf, 89
Harlem: in Hughes's *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, 92, 97–106, 107–119; postwar black culture in, 18, 26–27, 83; stoop culture in, 108–109, 117, 224
Hartman, Saidiya, 102
Hayles, N. Katherine, 257n29
hearsay: and aesthetic judgment, 129–130. *See also* gossip
Heidegger, Martin, 8, 121
Hejinian, Lyn, 54
Hemingway, Ernest, 50
Hemphill, Essex, 245
Herbert, George, 110
Hibbler, Al, 90
Hokanson, Robert O'Brien, 94, 95, 97, 112, 113
Holbrook, Susan, 262n129
Hollander, John, 110
Hollenbach, Lisa, 266–267n47, 269n84
Holiday, Billie, 140
homosexuality: and the closet, 20, 187; and Cold War culture, 143–145, 173, 178–180, 182–196; and reproduction, 189–190, 193, 196, 197–200; in *Sandover*, 178–181, 185–196; as threat, 173, 189, 205–206. *See also* queer gossip; queerness; queer theory
hooks, bell, 264n10
House of Fame, 37–38, 41, 42, 43, 58, 63, 76, 77, 91, 149, 168, 220, 225, 228, 244–245; and myth of Sargasso Sea, 8. *See also* Fame
Hricko, Mary, 88–89
Hughes, Langston, 1–2, 25, 129, 135, 201, 224, 225, 226, 229; archives of, 79–80, 81–82, 263n1; as depicted in "Blues" (Keene), 235–238; as a gossip, 119; homosexuality in works by, 80–81, 82–83; and *Looking for Langston*, 263n9; lyric gossip in poetry of, 12, 16, 17, 18, 24, 26–27, 83–84, 93, 106–119, 235; poetic voice of 83–84, 94–95, 97, 105–106, 110–111, 113, 114, 116, 118–119, 120, 125; queer gossip in poetry of, 119–125; sexual speculation about, 80–81, 82, 83, 94, 235; and simplicity, 95–96; and Xavier Villaurrutia, 235, 236–238
—works by: *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz*, 104; *The Big Sea*, 118; "Blessed Assurance," 80; "Desire," 237; *First Book of Jazz*, 103; "Harlem Night Song," 237; "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," 80; *Not without Laughter*, 80; *One-Way Ticket*, 84; "Poem (for F. S.)," 237, "Seven People Dancing," 80; "Simple" stories, 99–100, 101–102, 103, 104. *See also* "Jitney"; *Montage of a Dream Deferred*
Hughes, Ted, 286n103
Hugo, Victor, 176, 196, 208
Hurston, Zora Neale: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 87, 265n28

Ingram Merrill Foundation, 25
Izenberg, Oren, 275n42

Jackson, David, 28, 169, 178–179, 181, 209, 210, 215, 224, 284n76. See also *Changing Light at Sandover, The*
Jackson, Virginia, 15–16, 54, 93, 160, 252n44, 279n90
James, Henry, 171
Jaworski, Adam, 108, 119, 125
Jemie, Onwuchekwa, 92, 107
"Jitney" (Hughes), 84–92, 110; apostrophe in, 91–92; black vernacular in, 87; gossip as aspect of, 85–91; queerness as manifested in, 88–90; voices in, 90–91
Johnson, Barbara, 59, 63, 65, 66, 67
Johnston, Devin, 190
Jolas, Eugene, 31, 70
Jolas, Maria, 31
Jones, Meta DuEwa, 270n96, 270n98

Joyce, James, 70, 96
Julien, Isaac, 263n9

Kallman, Chester, 201, 202
Kalstone, David, 203, 215
Keats, John: "Ode to a Nightingale," 56–57
Keene, John, 28–29, 229; lyric gossip in "Blues," 234–238; and queer style, 236–238
Kent, Kathryn R., 74, 257n29
Kierkegaard, Søren, 280n1
Kilmer, Joyce, 103
Kinsey Report, 144
Koch, Kenneth, 136, 144, 152, 156
Koestenbaum, Wayne, 13, 22, 195, 255n10

Ladies' Voices (Stein), 48–49, 51, 60, 91, 118; gossip as aspect of, 36, 37, 40, 43–53, 58; hierarchies in, 45–46; metalepsis in, 50–51, 118; publication history of, 49
Landers, Ann, 3–4, 5
Lang, V. R., 141
Lavender Scare, 18, 28, 173, 186
Lederer, Eppie, 3
Legman, Gershon, 164
Lehman, David, 203
LeSueur, Joe, 136, 278n80
Lewis, Wyndham: on gossip, 68–70, 73
Loeffelhoz, Mary, 55
Louis, Joe, 120–121, 272n139
Love, Heather, 187–188
Lowell, Robert, 157, 278n80; "Skunk Hour," 7
Lowney, John, 123
Luciano, Dana, 260n103
Lucia novels (Benson): and *Sandover*, 203, 285–286n93
Luoma, Bill, 231
Lurie, Alison, 195
lyric, 63, 183, 119–120, 131, 149, 157, 159, 160, 163, 164, 166, 212, 223, 224, 230–231, 233, 240; birdsong as, 55, 56, 57, 234; and gossip, 15–18; modern understandings of, 11, 15, 17, 18–21, 24–25, 63; and the New Criticism, 15–16, 128; and privacy, 2, 19, 159, 161, 175–176, 180, 181, 250n7, 253n50, 253n54; and sexual identity, 20–24, 144, 178, 179–180. *See also* address; lyric subjectivity; poetic speaker; tone; voice
lyric gossip, 15–18, 93, 224, 228, 229; as alternative to lyric reading, 15; future of, 28–29, 247–248; and mixed-genre writing, 235; and queer sensibilities, 2, 24–29; as reparative mode, 17–18. *See also* Hughes, Langston; Keene, John; Merrill, James; Myles, Eileen; O'Hara, Frank; poetic gossip; Powell, D. A.; Spahr, Juliana; Stein, Gertrude
lyric reading, 15–16, 17, 25, 54, 92–94, 94–95, 102, 104, 128–129, 210. *See also* address; poetic speaker; tone; voice
lyric subjectivity, 16, 17, 18, 24, 27, 58, 78, 84, 93, 95, 102, 139, 151, 154, 159, 161, 163, 166, 167, 174, 177, 222, 223. *See also* poetic speaker; voice

Mariah, Paul, 245
Marx, Raoul, 220
Masters, Edgar Lee: *Spoon River Anthology*, 6
Materer, Timothy, 205
Matisse, Henri, 31, 41, 42
May, Elaine Tyler, 189
Mayer, Bernadette, 259n77
McCarthy, Joseph, 182
McCarthy era: gossip in, 20, 28; and homosexuality, 144, 182–183, 186, 281n28
McHale, Brian, 195, 203
McIntyre, O. O., 261n116
Mercer, Kobena, 88
Meredith, William, 183
Merrill, James, 1–2, 25, 224, 225, 227, 229, 242, 244–245; and account of burnt letters, 182–183, 185, 187, 282n41; education at Amherst, 213; lyric gossip in poetry of, 16, 24, 28; and Toklas, 25
—works by: "Acoustical Chambers," 218; *A Different Person*, 179, 180, 182, 187, 197, 213, 223; *Late Settings*, 171; "The Peacock," 201; "The Plato Club," 171–172; "Poets at Home," 220–221; *A Scattering of Salts*, 171; "Transfigured Bird," 201; *Voices from Sandover*, 171. See also *Changing Light at Sandover, The*; Ouija board
metalepsis: in *Ladies' Voices*, 50–51; in *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, 118; in Frank O'Hara's poems, 135, 137–138, 154

Mill, John Stuart: on poetry, 2, 19, 54, 55, 57, 63, 157, 159, 164, 175–176, 181, 217, 240, 249–250n6
Miller, D. A., 168
Miller, Richard, 152
Miller, William Ian, 147, 148, 165
Milton, John, 176
Mitchell, J. J., 11
Mitchell, Joan, 129–130, 131
Mitsotáki, Maria, 208. See also *Changing Light at Sandover, The*
mixed-genre writing, 235
modernism, 17, 129, 180; authorial ideals of, 36, 68–73, 78; and autonomy, 21, 154; and fragments, 9; gossip about, 30; gossip's part in, 70; and mass culture, 39, 69; and obscurity, 96
Moffett, Judith, 188
Montage of a Dream Deferred (Hughes), 14, 16, 17, 26, 224, 264–265n22, 266–267n47, 270n96; bop culture in, 84, 86, 92, 94, 97, 98–99, 103, 104, 111–112; "Cafe: 3 A.M.," 80, 109, 123–124, 272n142; "Children's Rhymes," 97, 98; "Comment against Lamp Post," 106, 112–113; "Comment on Curb," 114, 115, 118; "Comment on Stoop," 106, 108, 109–110; "Dream Boogie," 93, 97, 98, 99, 100, 104, 106; echo as trope in, 110–111, 113, 114, 119; "Figurette," 111–114; "Figurine," 104–105; "Gauge," 100, 101; "Harlem," 92; homosexuality in, 98–99, 122–125; Hughes's voice in, 84, 94–95, 96, 97, 105–106, 110–111, 113, 114, 116, 118–119, 120, 125; jive in, 97, 98–105, 114; "Joe Louis," 120–121; "Live and Let Live," 122–123, 124; "loud-talking" in, 117–118, 129; as lyric, 267n51; lyric gossip in, 16, 17, 26–27, 83–84, 93, 106–119, 269n90; metalepsis in, 118; "Motto," 101; "Neighbor," 109; obscurity in, 26, 96–106, 125; party lines in, 116–117, 119; queer gossip in, 84, 119–125; "Question," 104–105, 122; "Same in Blues," 114–116, 117, 118; "Sister," 107–108, 110, 122; "Theme for English B," 92; vernacular in, 84, 96–97, 106, 111–112; voice of gossip in, 106–119; voices in, 83, 92–95, 112, 119–120, 124–125; "What? So Soon!," 111–113, 122; "World War II," 110
Moore, Clement Clark, 103
Moore, Marianne, 222
Morse, Robert, 203, 285n93
Moten, Fred, 102, 269n90
Moynihan, Daniel Patrick, 269–270n95
Mullen, Harryette: "Elliptical," 14
Muñoz, José Esteban, 82, 204, 252n47
Myles, Eileen, 28–29, 161, 229, 238–242, 289n20; lyric gossip in works by, 239–242; Frank O'Hara as influence on, 238, 239; and self-gossip, 240–241
—works by: "An American Poem," 276n48; "Call It In," 241–242; "How to Write an Avant-Garde Poem," 239; "[phone isn't]," 239–240

Nelson, Deborah, 250n7, 253n54
Nelson, Maggie, 235
Neutral, the: Barthes's concept of, 22–23, 43
New Criticism, 15–16, 54, 128, 160, 180; and poetic tone, 173–174, 210, 212
New York School, 13, 161, 276n48, 277n64
Ngai, Sianne, 214–215, 216
"Nobody's Friend," 3–5
Notley, Alice, 238
Nowottny, Winifred, 160
Nugent, Richard Bruce, 236

occult tradition: in poetry, 176–177, 208, 281n26, 286n103. See also *Changing Light at Sandover, The*; Ouija board
O'Hara, Frank, 1–2, 11, 12, 16, 17, 25, 27, 87, 170, 179, 201, 224, 225, 227, 229, 235, 244, 245; and composition of poems during social occasions, 136; on confessional poetry, 157–158, 278n80; critical assessments of, 127; cruising in poetry of, 143, 148–149, 163, 164, 165, 241, 276n58; death of, 127; and disgust, 147–148, 149, 163, 164–165; epistolary gossip of, 277n66; lyric gossip in poetry of, 16, 17, 18, 24, 27–28, 126–129, 133–142, 150–157, 164–167; metalepsis in poetry of, 135, 137–138, 154; and Eileen Myles, 238–239; pronouns in poetry of, 126, 134, 139–141, 163, 167; proper names in poetry of, 126, 132–142,

152, 274n22; queer culture in poetry of, 142–149, 164–167; self-gossip in poetry of, 129, 157–163, 167, 240–241; on Gertrude Stein, 256n13
—works by: "5 Participants in a Hearsay Panel," 130–131, 153; "Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul," 133, 152; "At the Old Place," 140, 141; "Autobiographia Literaria," 138; "The Bores," 145–146; "Day and Night in 1952," 151, 155, 161; "The Day Lady Died," 140; "Dialogues," 156; "Dido," 162–163; "Essay on Style," 157; "Grand Central," 149, 166, 241; "Homosexuality," 149, 154, 155, 166, 241; "Joe's Jacket," 147, 151; *Kenneth Koch, a Tragedy*, 144, 156; "A Letter to Bunny," 141; "The Lover," 155; *Lunch Poems*, 136; "My Heart," 138; "Olive Garden," 157; "On Rachmaninoff's Birthday," 156, 277n75; "A Party Full of Friends," 132–133, 134–139, 141–142, 154, 155; "Personal Poem," 140–141; "Personism: A Manifesto," 143; "Poem (Hate is only one of many responses)," 148; "Poem (Hoopla! yah yah yah)," 284n59; "Prose for the Times," 142–145, 147–148; "A Proud Poem," 126, 127, 146; "Round Robin," 133–134; "Song (Is it dirty)," 164–167, 279n103; "Spleen," 146–148, 151, 154, 163, 165; "To Richard Miller," 152–153; "To the Poem," 144; "The 'Unfinished,'" 153; "A Young Poet," 144
Ouija board: erotics of, 122, 206–209; Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath's sessions with, 286n103; in *Lucia in London*, 203; *The Ouija Board* (Rockwell), 206–208; role of in James Merrill's life and poetry, 171, 172–173, 174, 177, 178, 181, 190–191, 203, 224, 227, 282n43, 382n47. See also *Changing Light at Sandover, The*
Ovid: and the House of Fame, 37–38, 41, 42, 43, 58, 63, 77, 149, 168–169, 225, 228

Pack, Robert, 279n91
paralipsis, 251n28, 262n126; in *Sandover*, 176; in *Stanzas in Meditation*, 74–75; as trope employed in poetic gossip, 12–13, 81
paranoia, 214–215
Park, Clara Claiborne, 279n90
Parker, Helen, 134
Parker, Patricia, 93
party line telephony, 116–117, 119, 271n121, 271n123
Pavia, Philip, 131
Perloff, Marjorie, 32, 127, 133, 228, 278n80, 279n105
Pharr, Eulah, 119
Phillips, Jeanne, 3
Phillips, Pauline, 3
Phillips, Susan E., 75, 262n126
Picasso, Pablo: *Homage à Gertrude*, 70–72, 73, 261–262n121
Plath, Sylvia, 286n103
Plato, 169; *Symposium*, 198–200. See also *Changing Light at Sandover, The*
poetic gossip, 1–2, 5–10, 23–24, 128; content as marker of, 11–12; and lyric poetry, 15–18; paralipsis as used in, 12–13, 74–75; personal pronouns as markers of, 14, 59–68; and privacy and queerness, 19–20, 75–77, 161–162; proper names as markers of, 13–14, 33, 131–142, 152; as a relational mode, 204–205; in 21st century, 228–229. *See also* Hughes, Langston; lyric gossip; Merrill, James; O'Hara, Frank; Stein, Gertrude
poetic speaker, 15, 16, 25–26, 27, 128, 160, 210, 279n90. *See also* lyric reading
Pollock, Jackson, 145
Pope, Alexander, 72, 288n142
porch culture, 87, 109, 117
Porte, Rebecca Ariel, 263n134
Porter, Fairfield, 147
Pound, Ezra, 12, 70, 168, 195; as depicted in *Sandover*, 216, 287–288n131; on gossip, 168; "Portrait d'une Femme," 8–10
Powell, D. A., 28–29, 229, 242–247; AIDS crisis and works by, 243–247; gossip and elegy in works by, 243–247; lyric address in works by, 246
—works by: *Cocktails*, 243; *Lunch*, 243, 244; *Tea*, 243–244, 245–246
Prins, Yopie, 252n44, 279n90
privacy and publicity, 2, 19, 229; and cellphone conversations, 240; gossip as mediator of, 19–20, 87; and lyric, 2, 19,

privacy and publicity (*cont.*)
159, 161, 173, 175–176, 180, 181, 213, 250n7, 253n50, 253n54; in *Montage*, 108–110, 116–117; in Eileen Myles's poetry, 240–241; in O'Hara's poetry, 108, 134, 149, 159, 161–162; and party line telephony, 117; in *Sandover*, 173, 175–176, 180–182, 186–187; in *Stanzas in Meditation*, 75–77; and stoop culture, 108–109, 110; and tone, 209–218
Proust, Marcel, 169
Puccini, Giacomo, 153
Puchner, Martin, 48, 50
Puttenham, George, 251n28

queer gossip, 9–10, 15, 18–24, 122, 145, 165, 224, 236–237; and modern lyric poetry, 25–26; as queer poetics, 83, 131–132, 185. *See also* gossip; Hughes, Langston; Merrill, James; O'Hara, Frank; Stein, Gertrude
queerness, 21, 22, 232; and domesticity, 38–39, 40, 173, 206, 208, 209, 231; ephemerality of, 82; and friendship, 205; and lyric gossip, 2, 24–29; and poetic identity, 20–24, 144, 178, 179–180; and privacy, 20. *See also* homosexuality; Hughes, Langston; Merrill, James; O'Hara, Frank; Stein, Gertrude
queer theory: and form, 252–253n48; gossip's contribution to, 2; and lyric gossip, 18; and privacy, 20; and queer inhumanism, 260n103; and utopian impulse, 204, 205. *See also* counter-archive; disidentification; Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky

Ramazani, Jahan, 249n3, 252n43, 266n44
Rampersad, Arnold: on Langston Hughes, 80, 81, 82, 92, 95, 264n10
Rankine, Claudia, 235
Reddy, Srikanth, 150, 276n60
Reed, Anthony, 267n61
Reed, Brian, 288–289n3
Reid, B. L., 31, 32
Retallack, Joan, 61
Reumann, Miriam, 189
Rich, B. Ruby, 117, 271n123
Richards, I. A., 212, 214, 222
Richardson, John, 262n121
Rieke, Alison, 74
Rimbaud, Arthur: as depicted in *Sandover*, 176, 178, 195
Rivers, Larry, 134, 144, 155–156, 275n46, 277n75
Rockwell, Norman, 206–208
Roessel, David, 95
Rogoff, Irit, 233
Rohy, Valerie, 190
Rosenbaum, Susan, 253n50, 256n16, 279n104

Salmon, André, 31
Sappho, 181
Sastri, Reena, 197
Schjeldahl, Peter, 141
Schmitz, Neil, 55, 61
Schultz, Kathy Lou, 264n19
Schuyler, James, 136, 245, 282n42, 289n20
Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, 20, 60, 148, 174; on gossip as nonce taxonomy, 21, 22–23, 41–42, 146, 215–216, 217, 243; and reparative reading, 17–18
self-talk, 158, 160–161, 162–163. *See also* Goffman, Erving
Shakespear, Olivia, 8
Shakespeare, William, 103, 111, 245
Shaw, Lytle, 133, 229
Shelley, Percy Bysshe: "To a Sky-Lark," 53, 56–57
Sherry, Michael, 179
Shetley, Vernon, 283n48
Shoptaw, John, 21, 124, 208, 278n76
Silverberg, Mark, 274n26
Smith, Barbara Herrnstein, 128–129
Smith, Hazel, 150, 155
Snodgrass, W. D., 221
Socrates, 199
Solove, Daniel, 168
Spacks, Patricia Meyer, 10, 12, 19, 21, 76, 87, 90, 128, 131, 249n6, 256n19
Spahr, Juliana, 28–29, 229–235; lyric gossip in works by, 232–234; Stein as influence on, 229–230, 232, 233
—works by: *An Army of Lovers*, 230; "Poem Written from November 30, 2002, to

March 27, 2003," 230–231, 232–234; *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs*, 229–230, 231–232; *The Transformation*, 231–232; "Turnt," 230
Stanzas in Meditation (Stein), 14, 17, 20, 26, 224, 233, 254–255n10; address in, 36, 63–68; Ashbery on, 20, 256n17; birds in, 58; and erotics of style, 75–76; fame as subject in, 72, 73; as juxtaposed with *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 32–33, 34, 55, 61; lyric gossip in, 16, 17, 20–21, 26, 32–34, 35, 36–37, 54, 57–58, 59–68, 73–78; as meditative lyric, 54–55; and naming names, 33, 36; paralipsis in, 74–75, 96; pronouns as used in, 59–68, 76; sexuality in, 74; and "They," 61–62, 231
Stein, Gertrude, 1–2, 25, 90, 128, 135, 153, 170, 171, 201, 225, 226, 229–230, 244, 245, 263n131; and 27 rue de Fleurus, 18, 73, 76, 224; and "conversation" pieces, 35, 37, 45, 47; critical denunciation of, 31, 69; as Fame, 71, 72, 73–74; as a gossip, 30–31, 36, 68–78, 257n29; gossip about, 261n116; as illuminated by Warhol, 40; on listening and hearing, 41–42, 51–52; lyric gossip in works by, 12, 18, 24, 26, 30–36; Picasso's homage to, 70–72, 261–262n121; proper names in the poetry of, 13
—works by: "A Ball," 55, 58; "A Bird," 55–57; *Everybody's Autobiography*, 32; *Four Saints in Three Acts*, 50; *The Geographical History of America*, 43, 57; *Geography and Plays*, 49; "An Instant Answer or a Hundred Prominent Men," 1; "Lifting Belly," 258n49; *The Making of Americans*, 42; "Plays," 51; "Poetry and Grammar," 46; *Q.E.D.*, 35, 40–41, 59; *Three Lives*, 30. See also *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, The*; *Ladies' Voices*; *Stanzas in Meditation*
Stevens, Wallace: as depicted in *Sandover*, 171–172, 194–195
Stewart, Susan, 119–120
Sullivan, Noël, 79
suspended agency, 13, 14, 15, 18, 24, 63, 139, 151–154, 162, 225, 228, 242
Sutherland, Donald, 32–33, 55
Sylvester, 244, 245
talk, 159–160, 161, 162. *See also* gossip
Taylor, Monique, 108
Testimony against Gertrude Stein, 31, 69
Thomson, Virgil, 50
Tiffany, Daniel, 96, 101
Toklas, Alice B., 25, 69, 74, 226, 255n10. See also *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, The*
tone, 16, 25–26, 28, 42, 173–174, 214–216, 222; in *Sandover*, 209–218, 222, 223. *See also* lyric; lyric reading
Tracy, Steven C., 92, 98, 101, 116
Transition (journal), 31, 69
Trotter, David, 150
Troy, William, 31–32
Truxell, Anne, 153
Tzara, Tristan, 31

Van Buren, Abigail, 3, 5. *See also* Dear Abby
Van Vechten, Carl, 25; and Langston Hughes, 79–80, 81–82, 83, 118, 263n1; on Gertrude Stein, 30
Vendler, Helen, 159, 170, 187, 203, 285n88
Villaurrutia, Xavier: and Langston Hughes, 235, 236–238; "North Carolina Blues," 235, 237
Vogel, Shane, 81, 272n142, 272n146
voice, 16, 17, 25–26, 102, 119–120, 122, 139, 213; and gossip, 38–39, 43–44, 49–51, 84, 85, 90, 92–95, 106–119. See also *Ladies' Voices*; lyric; lyric reading; *Montage of a Dream Deferred*

Walter, Eugene, 270n105
Wang, Dorothy, 95
Ward, Geoff, 133
Warhol, Andy, 40; *a, a novel*, 39–40; *Philosophy of Andy Warhol, THE*, 40; *POPism*, 155, 156, 277n70
Warner, Michael, 20
Warren, Robert Penn, 210
Warren, Samuel, 1
Warren, Vincent, 132
Wasley, Adrian, 283n45
Waters, William, 63
Weigl, Charles, 231
Weinstein, Norman, 257n28
West, Rebecca, 256

Wheeler, Lesley, 93, 95, 97
White, Edmund, 205; *The Beautiful Room Is Empty*, 276n49
White, Gillian, 17, 260n87
White, Heather Cass, 260n85
Whitman, Walt, 136, 181, 245
Whittier, John Greenleaf, 103
Wilde, Oscar, 60; on gossip, 169, 274n16
Wilson, August, 265n23
Wilson, Edmund, 262n125
Wordsworth, William, 5, 160

Yeats, W. B., 176, 196, 208
Yenser, Stephen, 184–185, 281n22, 284n62

Zimmerman, Lee, 285n88